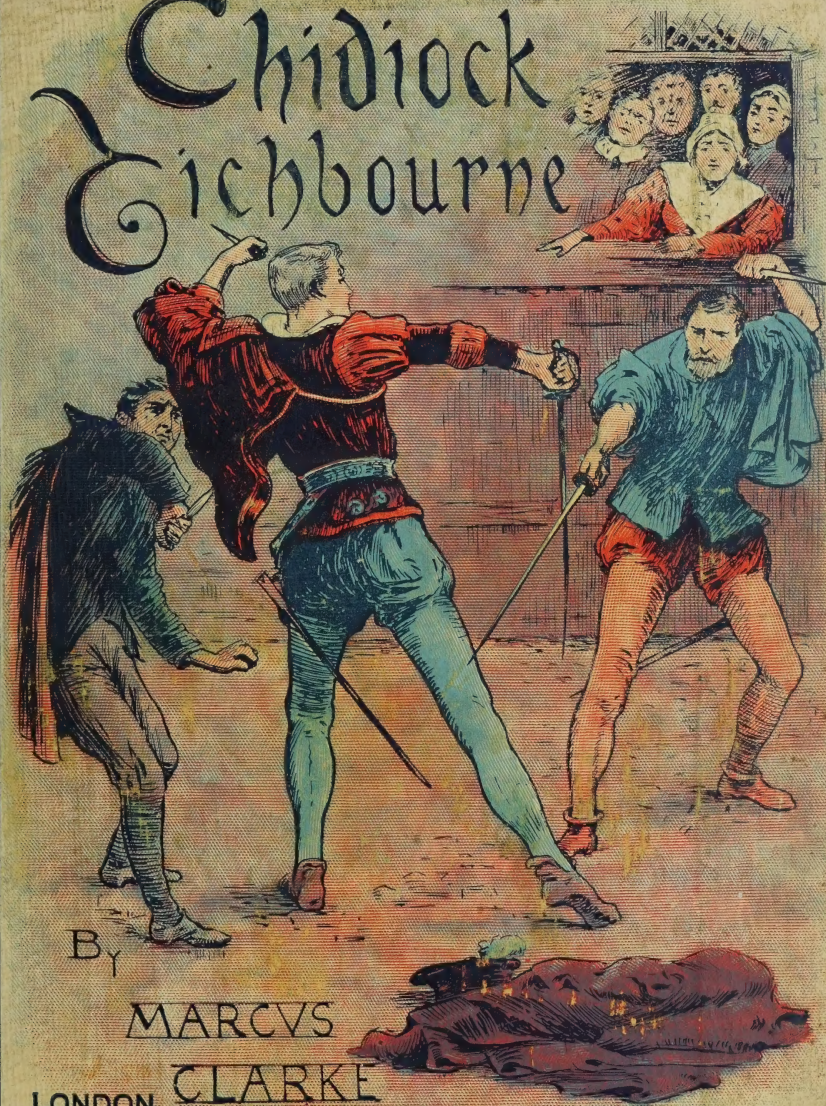


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OR THE

CATHOLIC CONSPIRACY

BY

MARCUS CLARKE

Author of

'FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE,' ETC., ETC.



SECOND EDITION

EDEN, REMINGTON & CO.,
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1893

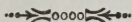
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CHIDIOCK TICHBOURNE



CHAPTER I.

MASTER WALTER GERRARD ARRIVES TO
SEEK HIS FORTUNE.

EARLY in the morning of the 22nd of May 1586, a young man dressed in a country suit, and riding a well-bred hackney, alighted in the stable yard of the Fountain Inn in Fleet Street.

This young man was about twenty-two years of age, of dark complexion and well-knit figure. His clothes, though boasting none of the extravagance of ornament with which the dandies of the Elizabethan day decorated their garments, were sufficiently rich to mark him as belonging to a class above the rank of the citizen, while a certain

air of daring which sparkled in his eye betokened—even more than the serviceable rapier which hung at his side—that he was ready and willing to engage in whatever venture fortune sent him.

Having seen his nag rubbed down and fed, the new arrival unbuckled a very modest valise from his saddle, and settling the handle of his dagger and the butts of his pistols—for in those days every traveller went fully armed,—tucked his sword under his arm, felt with one hand that a certain letter, which had lain for eight days in his doublet, was still intact, announced his name as Walter Gerrard, and inquired his way to the common room and breakfast.

Two guests only occupied the parlour of the Fountain.

One was a young man, or rather boy, about nineteen years of age. He was plainly dressed in a cloth doublet, of a sombre colour, and wore no arms. He was sitting over the fire, which the chill spring morning rendered necessary, and having apparently but tasted of the plentiful breakfast on the table, was occupied with his own thoughts.

From his appearance, it was probable that he was a citizen's apprentice, travelling on business.

The other occupant of the room was a fellow of different mettle—though of a sort which was frequent enough in the taverns of that epoch. A pair of huge mustachois curled into the corners of his eyes. His beard was rakishly trimmed. He wore a heavy hat, of Spanish favour, bearing a trailing feather, a slashed satin doublet much the worse for travel, over which was loosely buttoned an armless buff coat, decorated with tarnished metal buttons. A pair of pistol butts protruded from a broad military belt, and swagging against his booted legs was a huge basket-hilted Toledo.

This gentleman, seated on the oak table which ran down the centre of the room, held in his hand a flagon of ale, and was occupied in alternately dipping into it his fiery red face, and rating Master Hopkins the vintner.

‘I’d have thee learn, most worthy Hopkins,’ said he, as Gerrard entered, ‘that there be three sorts of ale—mild ale—clear

ale—and welch ale, not to mention small ale, (the which I hold in abhorrence, as being a liquor only suited for pottle-pots), and dagger ale, which is reserved for a better cellar than thine.'

'I would have your honour to know,' began Master Hopkins, in heat, 'that the cellar of the Fountain—'

'Peace, good mine host, peace,' said the other, with drunken dignity. 'Open thine ears and listen. I would have *thee* know that a pot of ale consists of four parts—*imprimis*, the ale—'

'Fore heaven—' expostulated Master Hopkins.

'Silence varlet! I say *imprimis* the ale, then the toast, the ginger and the nutmeg. It is certain that with spices duly applied and mingled in just proportion, thou mayest heighten the flavour of thy liquor, but then—'

'Nay,' said Gerrard not unwilling to enter into the humour of the scene, 'thou hast named *four* parts in thy compound. If thou countest the ale for one part—'

And marry, my young cockerel, who hast

taught thee the mystery of drinking ?' cried the stranger, wheeling round. ' 'Tis a science to the which I have devoted many years of unworthy service, and I hold no man my master in it. I have studied it in three countries—in England, France, and Spain. I have potted in Holland—sir. I have drank usquebaugh with the Irish kernes and cried me my upsa freeze in the Low Countries. For the judgment of Alicant, Gascony, Bordeaux, Haligo, and Malmsey, I do esteem myself of no mean condition. I have recipe for Aqua-Composta, which would stir old King Hal in his winding sheet; and, God willing, and this vile knave here being serviced with due materials, I will brew thee, at thy own charges, such a morning cup of Muscadine as shall set thy brain pan bubbling. *Madre di Dios*—which, mark you, is a vile Popish oath, and not to be tolerated in a Protestant country—an any man challenge me, Nicholas Hum, gentleman, *bon camarado*, bully boy and a true lad of the game by dark or daylight, I'll make his skinner ribs acquainted with the taste of Spanish steel !'

‘Oh I prithee, peace good sir,’ said the young man at the fire. ‘We are no swaggering bullies of Pauls, that thou shouldst put these ruffling airs upon us. Peace, I say.’

‘Ay! good Master Hum’—urged the host.

‘Master me no masters, thou perambulating beer bombard,’ roared the stranger; ‘my title is Captain!—Captain Hum! Known to the Prince of Parma, and other valiant commanders. Captain Hum, formerly of the Grey Musketeers, now gentleman at large, and sworn servant of the High and Mighty Princess Elizabeth, whom God preserve!’

Gerrard lifted his hat at this, and so did the young man at the fire saying, ‘Well Captain Hum, an’ it so please you, a God’s name peace. Drink and leave us.’

‘Leave thee, unmannerly youth! No—by this hand, never! Nor thee, my worthy host! Nor thee my intrusive but yet welcome stranger! I tell ye, ye shall drink a health to the Queen, and confusion, to all Popish plotters. Ho! drawer!

there!’ and pulling out a handful of gold pieces from his pocket, the loyal, but intoxicated captain proceeded to hammer the table with the now empty flagon, and shout for more wine.

Gerrard and the young stranger looked at each other, and each seeing in the other’s face his own thought, that it would be well to comply and be rid of the brawler, they consented.

‘Now, honest comrades,’ stammered Captain Hum, when Master Hopkins had brought the supplies so loudly called for, ‘if so be ye are honest comrades, and not Papistical knaves, attention! I will expound to ye the art and science of drinking as fit to be known to all good Protestants and valiant soldiers of fortune. I tell ye, sirs, that my notion of a man is one that can drink *super nagulum*, that can carouse the hunters hoop, quaff upsa freeze crose, and afterwards whip me out his rapier, like a cavalier of the first feather. Marry sir, I hold him but a peasant and a boor who will not take his liquor profoundly. For know ye, there be eight kinds of drunkards. *First*,

he that is ape drunk, and leaps, sings and dances. *Second*, he that is lion drunk, that smashes the windows, and bangs the pots withal. *Third*, he that is swine drunk, lumpish, and heavy. *Fourth*, he that is sheep drunk, or wise in his own conceit. *Fifth*, he that is maudlin drunk, when he will weep for kindness in the midst of his ale, and kiss you crying "By God I love thee, Go thy ways though thou thinkest not so often of me as I of thee!" and then putting his finger in his eye says, "God judge me but I would I did not love thee so well as I do." *Sixth*, he that is martin drunk, or must drink himself sober ere he stir. *Seventh*, he that is goat drunk and no aim but for grossness. *Eighth*, he that is fox drunk, or crafty drunk, as be the fashion of the trading knaves, who never bargain so well as when as by all virtuous men judging they should be under the table.'

'Well put, captain,' said Gerrard, 'but methinks you have exhausted your cartel prematurely. Wilt positively include all drunkards in thy list.'

'Well, young sir, as you press me' said

Captain Hum,' there is, as I take it, yet a ninth sort of toper—a gallant skinker, a right jovial pot-walloping blade!—one, by this hand, who can take the German's upsa freeze, the Danish rowsa, the Switzer's stoup of Rhenish, the Italian's parmisan, the Englishman's health!—and one who can *con amore* and, with all honesty, drain his hoops, his cans, his half-cans, his pots, his pottles, and his brimming beakers, having moreover, due cognisance of gloves, frolics, flap dragons, and such like trifles, not forgetting meanwhile, the more notorious qualities of the truest toss-pot. But such manner of man is rare, look ye, and deserveth cherishing. For mark me, sirs, not a leak at sea can suck more liquor, not little Sir David himself, can so promptly rescue a beleaguered brother. When it be your good luck to meet such a man—noble signioro—forgive me my familiar Spanish—grapple him, as Master Shakspear has it, to your souls with hooks of steel; give him of your best, feed him on pies of carps' tongues, on pheasants dressed in ambergris

and bruise the carcasses of four fat wethers to make him sauce for a single peacock.'

The worthy host opened his mouth wider than ever at this magnificent bluster.

'Nay, beshrew me, Captain Hum, but thine honour hath a great invention!' said he.

'Tush!' hiccupped the captain, ''tis the wine, good Master Hopkins—the wine, what says the poet?' and he suddenly burst into melody.

"The merest fool shall teach a school
By claret's operation,
And cowards fight like men of might
Or champions of a nation.'
'Canary sack makes firm the back,
While alicant and sherry
Are proved right good to clear the blood
And make the senses merry."

'Hay, boys, what say ye? Is not that the true philosophy?'

'I think in good sooth, most melodious of captains, that thou art in the right on't,' said Gerrard, who had no wish to embroil himself in a tavern quarrel. 'I agree with thee.'

'Then,' said the captain, 'is thy state the

more gracious, for thou art in same mind
with a valiant soldier. Ho! ho! ho!
lets—

“ Tope and be merry, be jolly and cheery,
Since here is good wine, good wine,
Let's laugh at the fools who live by dull rules,
And at us good fellows repine,
With a rousa!”

‘Gentlemen, God rest ye!’ With which
this philosopher of intoxication twisted his
whiskers, clapped his hand upon his sword
hilt, and staggered with intense dignity
out of the chamber.

‘A malison go with thee, for a swagger-
ing bully!’ cried host Hopkins in high
dudgeon. ‘When that purse of thine is
empty may the evil one seize me, if thy
figure darken my doors again.’

The stranger and Gerrard burst into
involuntary laughter. ‘Prithee have you
many of such gentry in your inns?’ asked
the latter as the innkeeper waddled away.

The stranger shook his head. ‘The
wars have cast many such swashbucklers
adrift among us. But you are new to the

town, methinks, sir, or you would not put such a question to me.'

'That truly am I, I have but this ten minutes drawn bridle in the stable yard.'

'Then beware and keep council before such fellows. I know not your errand, but believe me, sir, there are times it behoves a man to count his company.'

There was something so kindly in the tone of the young man's voice, that Gerrard bent forward to get a clearer glimpse of his features. The young stranger was of almost feminine beauty. His figure was slight but well knit. His hands were white, his eyes a dark grey that looked almost purple in the firelight, and a profusion of golden curls clustered round a smooth brow. When viewed in profile, however, the haughty curve of the nostril, the firm lips, and the square face gave to his expression a boldness and audacity which his soft voice seemed to belie.

'I thank you, for your hint, sir, though pardon me for the thought—but you appear yourself somewhat young to be counsellor.'

'I am not so young as I seem,' said the

stranger, 'and I have seen much though my years be few.'

'A traveller,' asked Gerrard.

The young man turned his fine eyes upon him, and replied as though he would fain answer all in a breath. 'I have travelled much and far. My trade demands it. My name is Gilbert, and I am clerk to Master Geraldine, the jeweller and goldsmith, of the Golden Hind, Cheapside. I know this town of London fairly, and my experience is welcome to you.'

Gerrard bowed, fascinated by a manner so much above the asserted rank of his acquaintance, and not to be outdone in courtesy, said, 'My name is Walter Gerrard, a poor gentleman of Hampshire, who hopes to obtain entry into the public service, and I have come to present an introduction at Court.'

An almost imperceptible frown crossed Master Gilbert's face, as he said, 'Gerrard, I have heard my master mention the name as belonging to—to—'

'To a soldier of the reformed religion who suffered for his faith in a former

reign, perhaps,' replied Gerrard, somewhat haughtily.

'Nay, sir, an' I am intrusive, I ask pardon, I did but think that were you related to that noble gentleman, you would not fail to gain favour at a Court where Queen Elizabeth is Queen, and Burghley and Francis Walshingham, Ministers.'

'I may hope to win some notice from both perchance,' said Gerrard, suddenly on his guard, at the mention of these potent names. 'But you do not drink?'

'Nay, I have but poor brains for drinking, and as I made a journey from the city to-day, I'll e'en get on my road. God give you good day, sir,' and wrapping his modest cloak about him, the jeweller's apprentice donned his flat cap and withdrew.

Walter Gerrard finding himself thus left alone, finished the remainder of the Burgundy, ate his breakfast with the appetite of a man who has ridden thirty miles for it, locked his valise in his chamber, visited his horse with the caution of a traveller, and inquired with that important air which betrayed his own insignificance, the way

to his future patron. An hour later found him in the ante-chamber of Sir Francis Walshingham's house, in Sidon Lane, Tower Street, waiting for the audience which would give him entry into public service.

Before we go farther, let us make ourselves acquainted with the condition of that world of Court policy and intrigue into which our adventurer was about to plunge.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND IN 1586.

IN the year 1586 there were two Queens in England. Queen Elizabeth, the Protestant, had occupied the throne for twenty-eight years, and Mary, Queen of Scots, the Catholic, had been for eighteen years a prisoner in an English fortress. The attitude of these two Queens was the political problem of Europe.

Elizabeth represented the English adherents to the reformed religion established by her father Henry VIII, and carried with her the hopes of the Continental Huguenots. Mary, Queen of Scots, widow of a king of France, was regarded by the Catholics as a martyr to her faith. Henri

III—treacherous and profligate—was afraid to openly avow his detestation for Elizabeth, whom his brother the Duke D'Anjou had but four years before vainly sought in marriage; but he did not scruple to plot her destruction. The Duke of Guise, the leader of the Catholic party and the rival of the king, made no secret of his antipathy, and the Leaguers, for ever intriguing with Spain, knew that their detestation of the Protestant Sovereign was shared by her brother-in-law Philip. The head of this formidable alliance had been Gregory XIII, and was now Sextus V. These astute Pontiffs worked by means of the last weapon which Church policy had invented to combat the Reformation—the Jesuits. Philip had in 1578 founded a Jesuit College at Douay. This place became the special training school for Englishmen in the service of the Church of Rome. Father Morgan, the friend of the Scottish Queen, selected there his most trusted instruments. Thence came Byrant, Campion, Emerson and others, who, disguised as soldiers, jewellers, and cavaliers, poured into Eng-

land to urge the authority of the Pope, and the crime of allegiance to a heretic sovereign. English air was thunderous with plots, and there were enthusiasts abroad in France and Spain who did not hesitate to avow that to kill the Protestant Queen of England would be a meritorious act, and one deserving well of God and the Church. The policy of assassination was rife. Seven attempts had already been made upon Elizabeth. The Duke d'Alençon had died, poisoned at Chateau Thierry. The memory of St Bartholomew was fresh, and Henri of Navarre, the Protestant heir to the failing Henri Valois, habitually wore mail under his clothes. The Prince of Orange had been already murdered, and the Jesuits held the memory of his murderer holy. It had been laid down by the Church of Rome, 'that it was lawful to kill princes whom the Pope had excommunicated.'

Mary on her part was doing her best to aid her friends. Conscious of her value as a queen in the great game of chess which the powers of Europe were playing, she

made strenuous efforts to second the schemes of Guise and the Leaguers. From her various prisons, Carlisle, Bolton, Sheffield and Tutbury—she despatched packet after packet to her friends at the Spanish Court, to the French King, to Morgan, Mendoza, Alva, and the Jesuits at Douay. Her secretaries Nan and Curle were employed for hours in transcribing and translating ciphers, the most ingenious arts were employed in the transmission of news, the highest bribes, in Spanish gold, paid to those willing to risk their lives to such hazardous employment. Courageous, unscrupulous, and fascinating, Mary spared no pains to win the stake she played for. Her dangerous beauty, her winning manners were exercised upon all near her. Though more than forty-four years of age, she was fascinating enough to touch the hearts of young men, and turn the heads of old. Having survived three husbands, and being disappointed in her projected marriage with the Earl of Norfolk, she took for her last lover one Anthony Babington, a Catholic gentleman of Dethie in Derbyshire. This young man

had been page to the Earl of Shrewsbury, one of her gaolers, and it was said that he had become as infatuated with her, as had been Chastelard and Rizzio. Little was known of him, but those who pretended to be in the secrets of the French Court averred that he had opened for Mary fresh channels of communication, and in a manner focussed in himself the interests of the Catholics of England

Against these conspiracies Elizabeth had three safeguards—the loyalty of her people, her own undaunted spirit, and a human mole called Sir Francis Walshingham. This Walshingham was a man who lived in an atmosphere of conspiracy. He had made it his business to counter plot. The agents of Guise, of Sextus V, of Philip and of Morgan, were all in their turn subjected to examination by the agents of Walshingham. He fought right and left, he showered money—often from his own fortune—upon skilful spies. He possessed keys to all ciphers, information on all subjects. He was infamously invincible and coldly cruel. When a man served him, he rewarded him ;

when a man could serve him no longer he abandoned him. Once six agents who had been 'indiscreet' disappeared. Walshingham, that silent quicksand had swallowed them.

It was into the presence of this man that Walter Gerrard waited to be ushered.

CHAPTER III.

ON SECRET SERVICE.

HE waited until noon. The ante-room was crowded with persons waiting an audience, and couriers passed ceaselessly in and out bringing or bearing dispatches. Gerrard observed that some of these went directly to a thin pale man who sat near the door which gave entrance to the Minister's room. This man silently opened and read the packets brought to him, dismissed the messenger with a nod, or with a motion of his hand, committing him to the guidance of one of the servants.

‘Who is that man?’ asked Gerrard of his neighbour.

‘The Right Worshipful Master Phillips,

private secretary to Sir Francis Walshingham, (who may Heaven confound) and one of the most magnificent scoundrels in this trifling Island of England,' was the reply.

Gerrard looked at the speaker. He was a young man of four-and-twenty, dressed in a handsome suit of cut velvet, somewhat stained, and held his left hand thrust into his doublet. 'You seem to bear him but little good will?'

'No marry, nor would you, had he kept you waiting three hours, having a green wound, and a most valiant desire for small beer, see here,' and removing his hand, he showed that his doublet was stained with blood.

'A sword thrust,' exclaimed Gerrard. 'Nay, man, why not home and dress it.'

'Because I am on the Queen's service, my worthy comrade, and a scratch or two caught in the dark in a tavern brawl is not held to disqualify a full-grown man from riding to Whitehall. Ah!' he added, as Phillips, receiving a packet from a gentleman who came out of the presence chamber, advanced towards them. 'I am to be relieved at last.'

‘Master Abington,’ said Phillips, ‘you will carry this to Her Majesty.’

Abington bowed.

‘Dost accompany me, Telney,’ he asked.

‘No,’ replied the other, ‘my course lies cityward.’

‘Then we meet to-night! Travers and Charnock will be there.’

‘I am there,’ laughed Telney gaily.

‘But thou hadst better get Tom Salisbury’s sword-thrust dressed. Faith, the pair of ye were tilting at one another’s breasts in most murderous fashion.’

‘Gentlemen! Gentlemen,’ said Phillips, ‘these brawls will bring some of ye to grief an’ ye look not to it.’

‘*Voto a Dios,*’ exclaimed a tall swarthy man, who, booted and spurred as though for travel, leant against the wainscot in the corner, ‘but the times have grown marvellous nice if two honest gentlemen cannot cut one another’s throats in friendly fashion without all this turmoil.’

The pair of friends turned, and simultaneously outstretched hands.

‘What! Robert Gage? Now, well met! What brings thee to London?’

‘My pleasure,’ quoth Gage, twisting his moustachios, and adding with a glance at Phillips, ‘the country is too tame now that it’s cleared of those poor devils of Jesuits, of whom Master Phillips stands so much in awe. But come with me, Charles, to my chambers in Barnard’s Inn, and we will crush a cup of Gascony together. Abington, an’ thou wantest a sword to back thee in thy quarrels, mine is at thy service.’

And so linking arms, with many supercilious twistings of moustachios, the three young men staggered out through the doorway together.

Master Phillips, standing for a moment to look after them with an evil smile, felt himself touched on the shoulder. It was Walter Gerrard.

‘I prithee, sir,’ said the young man, ‘as I see thee to be in some authority here, and I have been waiting for the last three hours—aid me to present these letters to Sir Francis Walsingham.’

The confidential secretary turned.

‘Thy name, sir?’

‘Walter Gerrard—a Protestant gentleman of Hampshire bearing a letter from his kinsman, Sir Amias Paulet.’

‘Thy pardon,’ exclaimed Phillips, hastily. ‘I took thee for a comrade of yon snuffling gallants, who seem to think the ante-chamber of one of Her Majesty’s secretaries is a vintner’s tavern. From Sir Amias Paulet, didst thou say?’ and he took the packet. ‘Follow me.’

Opening the door he led Gerrard into the presence of the Minister. Sir Francis Walshingham—a dark man with broad lips and keen eyes, having a skull-cap of black silk pulled over his ears almost to his ruff—was seated at one end of a long table, down the sides of which several secretaries were writing. A curtain behind him seemed to mask the entry to another chamber. Phillips presented the packet.

‘A messenger from Sir Amias Paulet,’ said he.

Walshingham ran his eyes over the letter.

‘So thou art a son of the Walter Gerrard

who suffered at Smithfield? I remember him. Sir Amias, a trusted friend of mine, recommends thee for employment. What canst thou do?’

‘Your bidding, sir, and faithfully,’ said Gerrard who felt that it behoved him to be cautious.

Walshingham smiled, as if pleased, and looked at Phillips, who leant forward and respectfully whispered something in his master’s ear.

‘I suppose thou hast seen enough of taverns and tapsters, young sir,’ said the Minister, ‘and being tired of thy roistering acquaintance desirest some more active and honourable employment than the swilling of Alicant, or the beating of the watch.’

‘Your honour mistakes me,’ returned Gerrard, flushing. ‘I have but been in London since eight this morning, and the only roisterers with whom I have held converse have been those whom I saw with Master Phillips in your ante-chamber. I am a stranger to the town.’

Again the Minister and his secretary interchanged a glance, and Walshingham asked,

‘Thy lodging?’

‘The Fountain Inn in Fleet Street for the present. But having no attendant, and but a slender purse, I must find some humble hostelry if I fail to win your favour,’ returned the young man with a boldness which made the scriveners at the table wince.

‘Thou hast a horse?’

‘A good one.’

‘And know no one?’

‘No one.’

‘It is well, Master Gerrard. I like thy frankness and would willingly pleasure my friend Paulet to serve thee. Retire. I will send to thee.’

Gerrard passed into the ante-room, and was presently followed by Phillips.

‘Sir Francis is pleased with you, sir. He bade me give you these, and to consider yourself in his service.’ So saying he placed in the young man’s hands a purse and a letter. ‘The one contains your instructions, and the other your earnest money. Seek your lodging and examine both.’

In less than an hour Walter Gerrard was

in his room at the Fountain, and pondering upon his first introduction to the secret service of politics. The purse contained fifty crowns—the letter of instruction ran as follows :

‘Some time between ten o’clock and noon to-morrow, a dark man, of thirty-five years of age, dressed in a buff coat, high boots, a fair hat of new fashion, having the band trimmed with silver buttons, and riding a strong grey hackney, will cross London Bridge and make for St Giles in the Fields. Follow him until you lose him or he suspects you. Burn this and keep council.’

Gerrard learned the letter by heart and then put it in the fire. He was a young man of some ambition and much curiosity, and until it grew dark he walked up and down the now deserted parlour of the Fountain, pondering upon his strange mission.

‘Who is this man in a buff coat, a God’s name,’ said he to himself. ‘What is his business? Is he prince, peasant, or soldier. *A hat of new fashion!* He is from beyond seas perchance. If Sir Francis desired to test my acuteness and discretion he could scarce have chosen a better means. *A dark*

man on a grey hackney. God a mercy, why, London swarms with fifty such! I can make nothing of it, but, nevertheless, I will do my best for I have found a liberal master.'

With this sage resolution, he put his purse into his pocket, took up a hole in his sword belt, and, cocking his country beaver, with as fashionable air as he could muster, went whistling into the street, in search of entertainment until to-morrow.

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE IN LONDON.

IN 1586 the streets of London wore a vastly different aspect to that which they now wear. The lighting was left almost entirely to private enterprise. Did it please a tavern-keeper or a private citizen to suspend a lamp over his doorway, well and good. The shops and booths for the most part closed at sunset, and the guardianship of the city was left entirely to the watch—who, composed of such material as Shakspear has satirised in the persons of Dogberry and Verges, did not impose much check upon the midnight revels of the gallants of the court, or the rufflers and roisterers who, 'flown with insolence and wine,' traversed

the town in search of adventure and entertainment. The footway was unpaved and muddy, while the kennels were deep and the road pitted with miniature quagmires. The playhouses relied solely upon afternoon patronage, and few sober citizens stirred abroad after dark, unless on urgent business and accompanied by their cudgel-armed apprentices and servants bearing torches. Nevertheless Fleet Street was by no means empty. Horsemen splashed up and down. Now and then one of the heavy coaches (the driver sitting on a low bar below the horses) which had lately come into fashion, lumbered towards the west, and foot passengers in plenty, all bent seemingly on the same errand as himself, jostled Gerrard at every step.

Walking but to get rid of the burden of his own thoughts, the young man turned towards the city, and found himself presently in the midst of a crowd of people who were surrounding an old man of meagre appearance and tattered clothes.

‘Good people, you wrong me!’ the wretched creature was crying. ‘I am a poor

citizen. You wrong me. By Saint Paul, you wrong me.'

'By Saint Paul!' repeated someone in the crowd. 'Is that a fit oath for an honest man's lips, thou mumping Papistical usurer, but thou shalt be drawn through the kennel to cool thy piety.'

'I know that villain,' said another. ''Tis Jabez Pinchfee the usurer. To the kennel with him! Choke him, the Romanish knave, in good London mud! What say ye, neighbours?'

A shout of assent followed the proposal, and it would have gone hard with Jabez Pinchfee had not a young man, richly dressed, thrust himself through the press, and drawing his rapier, placed himself on guard.

'Ye cowardly varlets! cannot ye hear a dotard devil, but ye must vent your loyalty upon him. For shame! stand back! I say!'

The crowd, somewhat awed by this sudden rescue, let go their prey, who crept between his defender and the wall.

'He is a Popish usurer,' said the voice which had recommended that Master Pinch-

fee should be drawn through the kennel, 'and has extorted undue moneys from a worthy Protestant hosier, whose wife is even now lying in of her ninth child.'

'Methinks the worthy Protestant hosier should reduce his expenses or his family,' laughed the stranger, 'for one or both of em seem in a fair way to bring him to penury! Away! I am ashamed to see Englishmen so fallen from dignity.'

Gerrard was about to step to the assistance of the unknown when an accident made him pause. A slight figure stepped from out the crowd and caught the usurer by the arm.

'Now, by this light, Sir Anthony Babington, what folly has possessed thee to risk thy life in a street brawl! Fie! man, thou shouldst have more sense. Moreover, see, here comes a troop of halberdiers who will see this honest scrivener safe to his dwelling!' The speaker was none other than Master Gilbert the jellewer's apprentice.

A troop of halberdiers coming up from the city-guard to Temple Bar made their

appearance in fact at this moment, and the crowd melted.

‘Faith thou art right,’ said the cavalier sheathing his sword, ‘it was a folly. We are late already. Come,’ and taking the other by the arm, he drew him down Clifford’s Inn Lane, a narrow street leading towards Holborn.

Gerrard who at the sudden apparition of his companion of the inn had withdrawn into the shadow of St Dunstan’s church found himself alone.

Master Pinchfee had resumed his journey, with tremulous haste into the alleys which lay between Fleet Street and Holborn, and the *soi disant* goldsmith’s clerk had already disappeared. Gerrard hesitated for a moment and then drawing his sword dashed hastily down the dark entrance to Clifford’s Inn.

‘Sir Anthony Babington! there is some mystery about a goldsmith’s clerk who is on familiar terms with a nobleman.’ In a few paces he caught a glimpse of his quarry, who, confident that they had not been

followed were threading quickly but easily the narrow mazes of the Inn.

‘They know the way well, at any rate,’ thought Gerrard, as he crept along behind them in the shadow of the lofty houses. ‘This is not the first time they have traversed these alleys.’ Passing down Fetter Lane, they turned into Church Yard Alley by the wall of the Pea Heart Inn, now dark and stable lantern-lighted only, until they reached Castle Street, when they turned down Duck Court and skirting Barnard’s Inn, disappeared fairly into a side door in the wall of a large mansion situated on that spot of ground on the south side of Holborn, bounded on the west by Chancery Lane, which is now known as Southampton Buildings.

Southampton Buildings is now the resort of barristers, and convenient from their contiguity with Lincoln’s Inn. The houses which form it are let in ‘chambers.’ In the time of which I write, however, Lincoln’s Inn was on an open piece of ground on the outskirts of the city proper, and had just been sold to the Benchers, by its owner Sir

Edward Sabard of Essex. The gardens were very fine and well kept, and the surrounding houses generally the property of men of station. Southampton Buildings in those days was Southampton House the property of Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, the patron of Shakspear. It was originally built by the Bishop of Lincoln (whose 'Inn' or town house, formed the chief ornament of the adjacent 'Fields') in 1147 and Thomas Wriothesley (the son of Shakspear's friend) pulled it down in 1636 or thereabouts.

Into the side gate of this mansion did the two figures disappear, and Gerrard found himself suddenly left in a dark bye-lane, leading he did not know whither and without any guide to show him the way out of the labyrinth.

'Master Gilbert must come out again before daylight,' said he 'and I suppose 'tis but a matter of waiting.' So saying he wrapped his cloak more closely around him and prepared to endure as best he might the tedium of watching.

Suddenly he heard voices and presently

two young men approached. 'Tis late,' said one 'I heard St Dunstan's chime the hour as we crossed the gardens.'

'Well hurry thee then forward.' These two speakers passed within two feet of Gerrard and he recognised them easily. They were the young men whom he had met in the morning, Charles Telney, and Edward Abington, the son of the Queen's under treasurer. They tapped at the postern gate and were admitted.

'I have stumbled upon a *rendezvous* it seems,' thought Gerrard. As the notion took him, two more cloaked gentlemen made their appearance from the opposite side of the street and met beneath the doorway.

'Ho! Charnock!'

'What! Travers!'

 and they also knocked and entered.

'Decidedly,' thought Gerrard shivering in the angle of the wall, 'but I have unwittingly thrust myself into the folk's business and if they discover me their six swords will soon disable me from my mission to-morrow.'

So soliloquising, he stole out of his con-

cealment and endeavoured to retrace his steps.

But this was not so easy. He became entangled in a network of courts and alleys, each turn brought him into fresh difficulties and at last bewildered and weary, he paused abruptly underneath the windows of a shabby house, from the opened windows of which streamed light and laughter. It was evident that he had wandered into a part of the town frequented by the dissipated.

As he paused uncertain which way to turn he felt a violent blow between the shoulders, and a sharp pain in his left arm. Jabez Pinchfee had followed him from Fleet Street, and had done his feeble best to stab him.

Luckily for Gerrard the vindictive cripple missed his aim and the force of his blow fell upon his victim's shoulder. The young man caught his assailant by the throat in an instant, and shortening his sword, prepared to repay the thrust by one which would end Master Pinchfee's earthly career, when a smart slap on the shoulder bid him turn his head.

Standing behind him there was a man of about forty years of age, having a red beard clutched in one hand and a sword in the other.

‘What dost thou here, comrade?’ said the newcomer.

Gerrard flung the usurer in the gutter, put his foot upon the poignard, and turned to the speaker.

‘Marry, I am about to avenge myself on an assassin,’ cried he in high indignation. ‘This grovelling atomy has just done his best to stab me.’

The man with the red beard cast a glance at the half-suffocated wretch in the kennel and cried,—

‘Why, ’tis little Jabez.’

‘Oh,’ groaned the usurer recognising the voice, ‘’tis thou Master Salisbury. Praised be the saints! Draw and kill—draw and kill! He is a spy upon us—a spy upon us!’

‘Ha!’ cried Salisbury fiercely, ‘dost thou say so. A spy a faith! On guard! On guard!’ and attacked Gerrard with fury.

‘Faith, heaven, you wrong me!’ cried

Gerrard, just able to conclude that this must be the terrible Tom Salisbury, who in last night's jest had grazed Master Abington's ribs. 'I am no spy. I seek but my own pleasure, and—'

'Waste not breath, good fellow, but parry,' said the other. 'Ha! well met! Ho, thou art no novice at sword playing! 'Tis well! I shall do myself the more honour by despatching thee! Jabez, keep back, or by the body of Christ I'll split that skull of thine with my dagger hilt.'

But the caution was in vain. The clashing of weapons had drawn to the window the merry party of carousers, and a dozen male and female heads projected themselves into the street. Master Pinchfee, doubtless eager to terminate the combat before interference should offer, picked up his dagger and rushing under Gerrard's guard stabbed him a second time.

The poignard penetrated the cloak which after the fashion of the age, the young man had twisted round his left arm, and cut his wrist, causing him to drop his own dagger.

'Now as I am a Christian man,' he cried,

‘but this is cowardly work. Ho! help there! Help ho!’

‘Curse thee, thou Satan’s limb, couldst thou not have left me to deal with him,’ said Salisbury spurning Master Pinchfee from him with his foot. ‘Spy or no spy, he shall not be murdered.’

‘Help ho! all honest men,’ cried Gerrard, taking advantage of this movement on the part of his antagonist to execute a thrust which slit that gentleman’s doublet and drew blood. ‘Help ho!’

‘Belly of the Pope,’ cried a jovial voice from the window of the lighted house, ‘but I recognise that pipe, ’tis my pupil of the Fountain. Nell, my rapier. Nay, wench, but I say I will have it. Ho! Mother Wag-tail there, undo the door! Boots, curse boots! When a comrade is in danger, ’tis no time to prate of boots. No! by the horn of David, no! Well thrust! I am with thee, ho!’

“To thee a full pot, my little lance-prisado

When thou hast smoked a pipe of Trinidado ;

Our glass of life runs short, the vintner shrinks it,

But with his wench the gallant soldier drinks it.”

‘To him boy! To him! Toho!’

And roaring his tavern catch, Captain Nicholas Hum, his doublet unbuttoned, his hose unbraced, and having but one boot, burst from the restraining arms of Mother Wagtail's damsels and rushed sword in hand to the assistance of Walter Gerrard.

Seeing this reinforcement Tom Salisbury began to give ground. The screaming of the women bid fair to alarm the neighbourhood, and presently by mutual consent, the three combatants lowered their weapons. The usurer had already disappeared.

‘We shall meet again, sir,’ said Salisbury.

‘And on more equal terms, I trust,’ said Gerrard.

‘It was not by my will that the reptile stabbed thee,’ returned the other. ‘Thou shouldst not meddle in affairs that concern others. London is wide enough for all men.’

‘Then I prithee direct me to mine inn in Fleet Street,’ said Gerrard, who now that he felt himself safe, was rather inclined to make light of his hurts. ‘I desire to know no man’s business.’

‘Right! right!’ interrupted Nicholas,

propping himself on his rapier. 'Each for himself, and God for the world.

"Drums beat, ensigns wave, and cannons thump it—
Our game is ruff* and the best heart doth trump it."

'Come put up your swords, bully boys, and empty a bottle to the god of bottles! Mother Wagtail! My boot! vile woman! my boot! A boot and a bottle is the word, ho! Come old mutton mongerer, despatch! despatch!'

Salisbury burst into laughter and sheathed his rapier.

'Thou art a merry knave, by this hilt,' said he, 'and God forfend that I should kill a man of so excellent a fancy. Show the new found friend to his tavern and heaven rest ye both.'

'My boot!

"Thus ever she cried, shoot home!
Shows, quoth the cavalier."

remarked the gallant captain, struggling on the doorstep with his horseman's boot and

* Ruff, a game of cards. The expressions of Captain Hum are often quaint, but the reader who is acquainted with the literature of the Elizabethan era, will find an explanation without difficulty.

vainly endeavouring to drag it over his torn cloth boot hose. 'Oh Beelzebub!'

'Fore heaven, 'tis a foolish quarrel!' laughed Gerrard, binding his wrist, 'and we are all well out on't. Come! Captain Hum—an thou be content to aid me farther, bring me to my lodgings.'

'That will I,' returned Hum, getting himself erect and evincing that the diversion of the recent combat had served in a measure to restore him to sobriety. 'Methinks this debauchery but ill becomes a man of my reputation. Nell, give me a cup of cool beer and pray heaven to mend thy ways. Henceforth I will eat naught but Friday fare and drink naught but fourpenny ale. A dish of eggs and a rabbit o' mornings, with one pipe of tobacco to close the orifice of the stomach, shall be my diet an' it please heaven to send me safely home. Good master red beard—for I know not thine honoured name—give me thy nief—thou hast this night crossed swords with a valiant soldier. Thou refuseth me! A murrain on thy conceit then! When I pace to the devil a foot thou shalt ride prancing

to hell upon a coach horse ! Sir, stranger and comrade, for thou standest to me in both these relations, I prithee take me by the arm, for my legs are drunk.'

'Come on then, good captain, a God's name,' said Gerrard seeing that his antagonist had departed and that the *bona notas* of Mother Wagtail were meditating a sortie to recover their prey. 'The night wanes. Lead me out of these alleys to the Fountain Inn and I shall be bound to thee for ever.'

'*Alla corago* then !' cried Hum, whose memory for locality was clear enough. 'To the right wheel ! So ! Handle your pans, blow your matches and on ! Faith the youngster leads me along as though I were a musket on a rest, presently to be discharged upon all and sundry !'

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN ON THE GREY HACKNEY.

THE Fountain Inn was reached without further mishap, and having seen the heroic Hum to his chamber Gerrard retired to his own, not to sleep, but to reflect.

‘Here I am,’ he thought ‘but landed twelve hours in the city already embroiled in a mystery. What is the link between Sir Anthony Babington and this young goldsmith’s apprentice? Why did Travers and Abington rendezvous? What has Pinchfee, who is evidently known to both Babington and Master Gilbert, to do with that reckless fellow Salisbury? Master Gilbert’s advice was sound. To meddle with such matters is not wise. I will betake myself to the

Bridge to-morrow, fulfil my mission and forget this night's adventure.'

Sleeping upon this resolution he awoke to put it into practice. He rose early, saw his horse fed, breakfasted alone, Master Gilbert, the tapster said, had already gone, while the Captain was not yet stirring, and the first stroke of ten found him upon London Bridge.

London Bridge, as most folks are aware, was in 1586 covered with houses. Large lofty mansions were built across the arches of the bridge, the passengers walking or riding beneath them. These mansions were built in blocks so that now and then one emerged from the archway beneath their ground floors into daylight, and saw that on each side below the parapet were stairs giving upon the bridge buttresses for the convenience of those who wished to take the water. The common method of travel being by water, wherry men plied incessantly across the river. The present gloomy warehouses and yards were then handsome private residences, having gardens running to the water and barges or light crafts

moored at their private 'steps.' The scene was bright, picturesque and varied, and Gerrard, having hitched his horse to a ring in the yard wall of a house near the city end of the bridge, felt his spirits rise as he paced up and down in the fresh breeze.

He waited for more than two hours without catching a glimpse of the mysterious stranger on the grey hackney. At length, just as the sun was at its meridian, the person described in Walshingham's letter of instructions passed under the first arch, yet crowned with the ghastly heads of the Jesuits, Byrant and Campion, and leisurely crossed towards Westminster.

He was mounted and apparelled as recorded. In person he was saturnine and sour, about thirty-eight to forty years of age, and wore a soldier's moustache and a Spanish peaked beard. A military handled sword knocked against his gelding's ribs, and beneath his cloak appeared the haft of the customary dagger.

There was nothing in the appearance of the mysterious stranger to distinguish him from the many gentlemen adventurers with

whom London swarms. He was to all outward seeming a soldier returning in comfortable ease from a campaign in the Low Countries.

Gerrard loosed his horse with beating heart and followed. The man on the grey hackney went straight up Holborn towards St Giles in the Fields, and when he reached the open country—for the 'town' of Elizabethan London ended where Oxford Street now begins—put his horse into a smart canter, and turned to the right towards the village of Tottenham.

It was a bright sunny morning as Walter Gerrard, quickening his pace so as to preserve the same distance between the grey nag and his own, felt his spirits rise.

'I have fallen into good luck,' said he, as he felt his horse bound gaily under him. 'A well-filled purse in my doublet, a good blade by my side, and a fresh horse under me!—by this light, but I would not change places with the Earl of Leicester himself! I hope my quarry's business may take him far afield, for I feel in high spirits to follow.'

He was not to be disappointed, for the

rider of the grey horse never drew rein until that serviceable nag had breasted the steep ascent to the northern heights of London.

In 1586 St John's Wood was still a forest, and stretched through Mansfield Park and Caen Wood, to the little village of Hampstead, which lay nestled in the manor of Belsize. Highgate, which Gerrard was approaching, was a hamlet of somewhat larger dimensions than its neighbours of Hampstead and Harrow. Its fine site and salubrious air made it a favourable spot for pleasuring. The Queen herself hawked and hunted in the woods of Hornsey and Muswell Hill; while in the village the custom of travellers to the north had created two commodious inns.

The man on the grey hackney however, somewhat to Gerrard's distate, did not pause at any of these taverns, but held his way through the village until he came to a large and substantially built house, which stood at some distance from the main road and was surrounded by a high wall.

Gerrard drew his horse round the angle of this wall, and heard a bell ring, and then

the sound of an opening and closing door mingled with the clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the stones of a courtyard. It was evident that the stranger had gone in.

'S'life!' said the young man, wiping his brow, 'but I have not got much information by my ride. However the fellow is housed for an hour or so, and I will give Oliver a feed of corn and myself a tankard of ale. Maybe mine host of the Vine yonder can tell me the name of my friend's residence.'

The host of the Vine was communicative enough, and as Gerrard partook of some most excellent powdered beef, washed down with copious draughts of brown bastard, he learnt that the red house was the property of a Catholic gentleman named Jerome Bellamy, who lived in strict retirement, paying the fines imposed by the Queen for non-attendance at church with the utmost regularity.

'I asked because I rode up the hill with a gentleman whom I left at the courtyard,' said Gerrard, straining fact a little in his desire for information. 'Master Bellamy

himself, possibly, for the porter made no doubt about admitting him.'

'Oh no,' returned the landlord of the Vine, eagerly 'Master Bellamy seldom rides abroad! What manner of man was he?'

'A dark soldierly fellow, with a square seat in the saddle and a black beard.'

'With a foreign air.'

'He seemed to have travelled.'

'Yes!'

'And taciturn of manner.'

'Very much so indeed,' said Gerrard, hiding a smile in the flagon. 'I did not hear him open his lips unnecessarily during the journey.'

'Tis Captain Fortescue,' said the vintner, with a decided air.

'And who may Captain Fortescue be? By the saints, but this flagon soon shows the bottom! Send another, good mine host, and share it with me.'

The man complied and seemingly as much delighted with the oath, as with the order, for our wily Gerrard had purposely used a Catholic expletive, sat down and opened his gossiping soul.

‘Captain Fortescue is the agent of Master Bellamy, and it please you,’ said he, ‘Master Bellamy has large estates in the north, they say, in Lancashire and York, which countries are somewhat more devoted to the true, ahem ! the *old* religion.’

‘Oh, fear not me, my honest friend !’ cried Gerrard, who saw that his guess was correct, that his host was a Catholic in heart if a Protestant in manners. ‘I am no informer of men’s opinions. Indeed, if truth be told, I care not much to relieve thee of thy suspicions that I am of the same faith as thyself. But in these times—’

‘Your honour is right,’ replied the other, ‘it behoves an honest man who would keep his busy ears at peace to set a padlock upon the strong box where he puts his conscience.’

‘True, friend, and this Captain Fortescue?’

‘Travels yearly into the North to collect the rents of his patron. He has been on some such journey, I’ll warrant me.’

‘Scarcely,’ said Gerrard, ‘unless the way to Lancashire lies over London Bridge, for it was there I first saw him this morning.’

‘London Bridge,’ said the taverner.

‘Oh, then it is Jabez Pinchfee, Master Bellamy’s banker, whom he has been visiting.’

Gerrard made an involuntary wriggle of the shoulders at the name of Pinchfee, for he seemed to feel the dagger of that malignant little usurer about again to descend between his shoulders.

‘Jabez Pinchfee, a strange banker for an honourable gentleman like Master Bellamy.

‘Your honour knows him then.’

‘Very intimately,’ returned Gerrard, rubbing his shoulder, ‘and know no good of him.’

The taverner shook his head. ‘That is what all the world says, but still Master Pinchfee is rich and of good repute among certain honest citizens.’

‘Doubtless, yet methinks there are others who would serve the cause with as much fervour,’ said Gerrard, who having guessed right once was emboldened to try again.

‘I do not say that,’ returned the taverner, with some hesitation. ‘My tongue wags too freely perchance.’

‘Tut, tut, one man may have an opinion

of another, I suppose, without much harm done. I like not this Pinchfee, for he has done me an ill service. He has doubtless done thee and thine a good one, and so thou properly requitest it with affection,' said Gerrard, fearful lest further affectation of Catholicity might bring upon him some pass word or pass sign which he would be unable to answer. 'Speak of men as thou findest them, worthy friend, and tell Will Ostler to bring my nag for I must be jogging.'

'Nay !' cried the tapster, horrified to see so promising a guest depart, 'but your honour will surely not stir yet. To ride upon a full meal is most hurtful. I have authority of a learned chirurgeon for it. Moreover, your nag has not finished his corn.'

As he spoke, Gerrard, who had not intended to stir until all chance of Captain Fortescue's reappearance was hopelessly gone, saw an object in the street which made him alter his plans.

That object was the grey hackney which a servant was leading to the smithy opposite

the window. It was evident that Captain Fortescue was safe for an hour at least. Gerrard paid his reckoning, directed his horse to be saddled, and thus left to himself began to reflect upon the best course to pursue.

He had successfully carried out his instructions so far. He had followed the mysterious stranger unsuspected, and had learnt his name and ostensible business. It was impossible that Captain Fortescue would go further that night, if, indeed the house of Master Bellamy was not the end of his journey altogether. The only question for Gerrard was, as to whether he should remain at the inn, or return at once to Walshingham. The latter course seemed the better, for a longer stay at the Vine might provoke inquiry, or at all events make Captain Fortescue acquainted with his person.

Walter Gerrard, however, was a man of considerable quickness and resource, and he remembered a maxim of the old soldier who had taught him fencing: 'Never go into action without securing a retreat.' It

might be needful for him to return to the Vine and he wished to have the means of doing so without exciting suspicion.

Taking Walshingham's purse from his pocket, he emptied it of all but ten pieces and then flung it between a huge sideboard and the wall.

'It is very natural for a man who is in a hurry to drop his purse, and still more natural that he should return to seek it where he last used it,' said he, and riding off in the direction of Hornsey, he turned when fairly out of sight, and regaining the road by a bridle path below the hill, never drew rein until he stopped in the courtyard of the house in Tower Street. Master Phillips was on duty as usual in the ante-chamber, and seeing Gerrard made a sign to him to follow.

He led him into a private cabinet, which was evidently set apart for such service, and in a few Minutes the Minister himself appeared.

'Well!'

'Well! I have followed him.'

'Good!'

‘His destination was a red house in Highgate Woods.’

‘Yes?’

‘The property of Master Jerome Bellamy!’

‘A recusant! I know him! Go on!’

‘This Bellamy has an agent, banker, what you will, a man named—’

‘Pinchfee—a usurer who dwells in Holborn Bars!’

‘Fore God!’ cried our adventurer, losing all patience, ‘but if you *know* all this why risk my horse’s legs and my own neck in the discovery of it.’

‘Young man,’ said Walshingham coldly, but without irritation, ‘it seems to me that you forget that you were paid for your labour.’

‘Certainly,’ stammered Gerrard, ‘but I thought—’

‘Ah! that is the mistake which young men always make,’ said Walshingham, ‘I did not pay you to *think*.’

‘Well then,’ said Gerrard sullenly, ‘I have obeyed your orders. I have followed the man described to me, without his sus-

pecting me, and I have housed him with a lame horse for the night.'

'I do not blame you, you have done well. Better than I expected. 'Twas a happy notion, that chat with the landlord of the Vine over a flagon of ale.'

Gerrard started with astonishment and indignation.

'You have had me followed, Sir Francis Walshingham.'

All men, however great, have their weak points. The weak point of Sir Francis Walshingham was his Omniscience. He smiled at the unconscious compliment which he had so skilfully provoked.

'Why should I have you followed? Do you think that the Queen has none in her service who can *reason*, Master Walter Gerrard? I knew where you were going when you told me that you had housed your man after a straight course. I saw by the hour of your return that you must have rested. A cavalier of your temperament rests customarily at an inn, and unless he be a churl, a supposition which your black eyes deny, pledges his landlord in a friendly cup.

The host of the Vine is the only man likely to be chattily informed concerning Bellamy's business. As that tavern is reputed famous for ale, I concluded that your flood of information was bi-washed by that excellent and comforting beverage. Am I not right ?'

Gerrard was silent. The cynical and penetrating tones of the Minister frightened him. He began to catch some vague glimpse of the enormous monster called Diplomacy, which can, like the elephant, crush a man with its foot or pick up a needle with its trunk.

'You say nothing, sir,' said Walshingham, tentatively.

'I have nothing to say,' replied Gerrard in all simplicity.

There was a moment's silence, and then the Minister, who had sunk into a chair on his entrance, arose and paced the chamber as if perturbed in thought. Suddenly he turned and clapped his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

'I like thee, Master Gerrard,' he said, 'thou hast prudence, courage, and wit.'

‘I am at your worship’s command,’ returned Gerrard, conscious that the fox eyes were bent upon him.

‘Wouldst win fame and fortune?’

‘Fame is dangerous, fortune precarious. I would obey you and serve the Queen.’

‘Cautiously answered. Tell me, do you know the name of this agent of good Master Bellamy?’

‘Assuredly. His name is Captain Fortescue, and as I take him, a soldier of the Low Countries.’

‘His name is John Ballard, and he is a Jesuit priest from the college of St Omar!’

Gerrard fell back stupified, for in the England of 1586 when the air yet reeked with the plots of Byrant, Campion, and Parry, the name of a Jesuit was as terrible as the name of a pestilence.

Walshingham continued, his cold eye fixed upon the young man whom he had destined to honour :

‘There is a conspiracy afoot, of what nature is best known to its contrivers. Ballard’s trips to Lancashire have been but disguises to his purpose.’

‘He has been sent by the Spaniard to raise the disaffected. Four days ago he landed from France with a letter in cipher for Mary of Scots. I must have that letter.’

‘But your Excellence,’ said Gerrard, feeling himself sucked as it were into a whirlpool of intrigue, ‘if your Excellence knew all this, why not have arrested the traitor at Dover.’

‘Because my Excellence is a man of sense,’ said Walshingham coldly. ‘And I not only want the letter, but the answer.’

‘I see, and I am to get them.’

‘By no means, the duty of obtaining the *reply* will devolve upon others. You must get for me the original.’

‘The signature of Mendoza, but how?’

‘If you ask how, you are not fit to be entrusted with the mission,’ said Walshingham, wrapping his furred gown round his thin legs.

‘I see, then I am to be the tool of your policy, if I succeed—’

‘You will be rewarded.’

‘If I fail?’

‘You will probably be hanged,’ was the cool reply.

Gerrard felt the sweat bead on his brow. His time of fortune was come. He understood that this expedition of the morning was but a trial. Now or never he must decide. Two courses were open to him, to withdraw at once from politics and Jesuit plots, or to risk his fate on his own daring and the unknown luck of the future.

He was twenty-two and he chose the latter. ‘I will bring you the letter.’

‘Very good,’ said Walshingham rising. ‘Then I will tell Master Phillips to expect you. The mention of your name will secure entrance here at all hours. Before Captain Fortescue takes the letter to its destination you must let me see it. That is all you have to do, use your own means.’

He had moved to the door of the chamber, as a signal that the interview was over, when Gerrard stopped him.

‘This is a hard task for one man,’ he said.

‘One man! you may have a dozen!’

‘But I thought that this was a secret mission,’ said Gerrard doubtfully.

‘It is! I have told you what I desire you to do. Take your own means to do it. If you succeed, you will be paid, if you fail—’

‘Well!’

‘I shall know nothing about you. God give you good-even, sir.’

And the Minister was gone.

Gerrard remounted his horse, and rode to his inn full of doubtful thoughts. He was determined to carry out his adventure, but doubted the best means of achieving so ticklish a purpose.

When he reached the Fountain he found a dejected looking object lounging on the doorway. It was Nicholas Hum.

‘What is the matter, friend?’ quoth he.

‘Hell is the matter in plain English,’ replied the valiant tipster. ‘Mother Wag-tail’s damsels have cleansed me of coin, and I am a Pierce Pennelesse worse than the playactors can boast of.’

A thought struck Gerrard.

‘Captain Hum, wilt thou engage in my service for liquor and charges. I am bound on an expedition to the North, and need a trusty blade to bear me company.

Thou hast saved my life once, and if thou wilt—'

'Say no more, bully boy,' cried Hum, 'I love thee! A cup of Charnece shall seal us friends for ever. Nay, I am thine, thou swashbuckler and jovial comrade, thy shiev-a-wit and poetaster so long as liquor be left to him. For—

“ He that's full doth verse compose,
Hunger deals in sullen prose—
Take notice and discard her.
The empty spit
Ne'er cherished wit—
Minerva loves the larder.”

'Where bound, *bon camarado* ?'

'On perilous services,' said Gerrard, who saw beneath this affectation of roistering much sturdy valiance; 'yet service which, if well carried through, will win renown and fortune.'

'I am with thee,' quoth Hum. 'Let me but have meat to my belly, rags to my back, and a flock bed to snort on, and when I die, the longest liver take all.'

'Then, it's agreed !'

'It is, and we start ?'

'Now,' said Gerrard.

'*Madre di dios*,' swore Captain Hum.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET OF MASTER BELLAMY'S HOUSE.

ARRIVED at the bottom of Highgate Hill, Gerrard instructed his companion how to act.

‘I shall return to the Inn for my purse and decide to sleep there. Do you come presently after me a benighted traveller, and contrive admittance. We will meet as strangers, and having made acquaintance thou shalt seek a chamber near to mine.’

‘But with what intent, most valiant and engaging of youths? Dost thou go coney catching among the lunous of the citizens. Hast thou a sly slice of Eve’s flesh concealed at the top of this most heart breaking pile? Is it the old game of Horns that we are

playing at? I prithee speak, for I like not to adventure my neck without knowing the ply of the rope.'

'It is honest service to the Queen and to the realm, thou needst fear nothing.'

'Fear is not the feeling which sways me,' quoth Captain Hum. 'But I have a judicious and most pious dread of embarkation in ventures pernicious—to the true Church. Since a comrade of mine had his ears nailed to a post for asserting that the Pope was a gentleman of some Christian consideration. I have been ever most careful to avoid meddling or making with schemes of that manifestly ribald and ungodly creed.'

This speech showed Gerrard the necessity of caution. It was true that Hum knew nothing of the purpose of the expedition. It was certain also that the captain had conducted himself as a valiant if somewhat eccentric soldier. Yet the warning of the young goldsmith occurred to him, and he determined to make further trial of Hum's fidelity before entrusting him with the secret of the journey.

'Thou hast guessed my secret, captain,'

he said. 'There is in good sooth, a certain pair of blue eyes in the neighbourhood which look on me with no disfavour, and though the business is fraught with some chance of a sword thrust—'

'A sword thrust! My comrade, thou art a young Alexander. Love and the duello will make an old man a youth. I am thine to the tips of my fingers, and shouldst thou needs an hour's intercourse with thy sweetheart, show me her husband and I will keep him well entertained at the point of my rapier until thou criest "off and unsling," On with thee to thy *rendezvous*, I will follow.'

The ruse of the lost purse succeeded without difficulty or suspicion, and Gerrard was speedily installed in his new quarters, and specially ministered to by the delighted host in person. The advent of Hum, who played his part to perfection further increased the taverner's hilarity and when the two pretended strangers fraternised, clubbed purses and invited the host to supper a merrier party could scarce be met with.

As the night waned, Gerrard, however, grew anxious. He had ascertained that Ballard or Captain Fortescue would not go further that night. The grey horse had been returned to his stable, and a light in the window of the red house gave to Will Ostler the assurance that the stranger was occupying his usual room. Gerrard standing in the yard of the Vine, with his hands plunged into the pockets of his breeches, and his hat pulled over his brows, was engaged in contemplating that light, when an occurrence took place which gave him a new idea.

From the interior of the lighted room, a figure advanced, and rapidly crossed the curtains. Gerrard had sufficient time to see this figure outlined, as it was in the strong light of the chamber, and he recognised without difficulty the young man of the Holborn riot, Sir Anthony Babington. His resolution was taken, he would explore that house.

‘Hum,’ he said, as soon as the door of the double chamber allotted to them had closed. ‘I am bound on a midnight visit, I prithee

keep the door and let no one but myself enter.'

'Marry, that I will,' returned the captain, who had entered with the greatest glee into the prosecution of the imaginary intrigue. 'Knock thou three times on the door, then I will open to thee. For all the world else I am an Armida. But I would prefer fighting a little, dear comrade, if such sport is obtainable. I have not killed a man for full seven weeks, and grow rusty on swad play. Has not your fair one some brother with a weasard worth the slitting?'

'Keep here, dear Hum, and do as I beg thee. Should there be hope of bloodshed I promise to rouse thee.'

So saying Gerrard tied his shoes round his neck, buttoned his doublet over his pistols, put his naked sword between his teeth, and went out of the window down the waterpipe like a marmozet. Hum, swore a prayer.

The night was dark and windy, and Gerrard had little fear of being seen or heard. He crept along in the shadow, made a dart across the open space, and found

himself in the lane beside Master Bellamy's house. He stole on until he reached the wall, and there he heard a sound which bade him pause, the jingling of mail chains.

There were four horses held by a page in the lane.

Gerrard retraced his steps and then made a circuit of the wall arriving at the back. Here he paused in still greater alarm. The back of the house was brilliantly lighted.

It was very evident that he had hit upon a rendezvous more mysterious than that of the previous evening. He felt along the wall until he came to a place where the ivy was strong enough to bear his weight and there he climbed up. The garden was deserted and in another five seconds, he found himself on the terrace looking into a long room lighted with candles and filled with people. His heart beat with that undefinable joy only known to adventurers when he recognised the persons whom he had met in St Giles' Fields on the previous evenings.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN FORTESCUE'S INTELLIGENCE.

TELNEY ABINGTON and Gage sat side by side, Travers and Charnock leant against the wainscot, Salisbury twisted his red beard at the fire, and Sir Anthony Babington, whose noble figure and composed countenance gave token of a command at once acceded and maintained, leant over the table in deep talk with an old man of upright presence and keen eyes and white hair, whom Gerrard guessed was the master of the house, Jerome Bellamy. Two strangers talked together in the corner, and at Bellamy's right, silent and stern, sat the saturnine man whose advent had produced this meeting, Captain Fortescue, otherwise John Ballard the Jesuit.

There was no need to conjecture the business of the hour. Read by the presence of the disguised priest, all was clear, and Gerrard understood that the conference at which he was assisting as witness was a Catholic conspiracy.

As he comprehended this, his hand involuntarily sought his sword hilt. Walter Gerrard was born of a Protestant house which had seen some trouble, and he knew what was the customary fate of any heretic caught unlawfully participating in such mystery.

As he drew back from the window, the door of the chamber opened and there advanced into the room a young man of five and twenty, of a rich olive complexion and foreign air. The new comer was magnificently dressed in a suit of violet velvet. The loop of his hat was fastened with a single diamond, his sword hilt flashed with gems, and in his right ear he wore a jewel after the fashion set by the French King.

Nevertheless, the effeminacy of his costume was redeemed by its wearer's brilliant

eyes and haughty bearing. Perfumed, earringed and jewelled, Gerrard saw in him the type of the desperado of the age, the dare-devil dandy, who waxed his moustachios to fight a duel, wrote sonnets on perfumed paper, and sailed home from a venture in New Spain with his clothes in rags and his sails of cloth of gold.

The company saluted him with respect, for he was none other than Chidiok Tichbourne of Southampton, the head of one of the richest Catholic families in England.

Beside this splendid personage was a figure which made Gerrard start—Master Gilbert, the jeweller's apprentice.

‘This young sprigold had better heed the advice he so lavishly bestowed upon me,’ he muttered. ‘Belike, ’twill be *his* neck, not mine, that will have need of wit in the saving,’ and he crept close to the window, if haply he could catch aught of the conversation.

After the first greeting had been exchanged, Chidiok Tichbourne turned to Ballard with eagerness, and asked, ‘What news?’

‘The best of news,’ said Ballard grimly, ‘but first I pray you, good Master Bellamy, to let me know my company, who are yonder gentlemen?’

‘John Charnock of Lancashire, and John Savage, my old companions of Barnard’s Inn, for whom I will be answerable,’ said Abington.

‘And I am Tom Salisbury of Denbigh,’ cried that gentleman rising, ‘and am answerable for myself at any time, with all weapons. Faith, good father, it is thy trade to be suspicious.’

‘It is my duty, sir,’ returned Ballard, with a sternness which seemed not without its effect. ‘There are other heads in hand beside thine.’

‘I would give five pieces, that he would ask Master Gilbert who is answerable for *him*,’ muttered Gerrard, who with his ear glued to the window sash, had caught some of this colloquy. But the jeweller’s apprentice had taken his seat beside Master Bellamy, with the assurance of one who is already known and trusted.

‘Come, good father, thy news,’ said Tich-

bourne, striking the table impatiently with his silk glove, 'we are on tenter hooks.'

'Master Morgan has hopes of the Valois,' said Ballard. 'He has been admitted to interview, and Henry promises both money and arms.'

'He was ever a promiser,' said the man known as Savage. 'I have served in his forty-five, and know him.'

'Paget names Northumberland, Arundel, Westmoreland, as likely to rise for Mary, if there be chance of success, and I have here a letter from Mendoza himself,' and unbuttoning his buff coat, Ballard drew out the missive upon which Gerrard's fortune depended, and placed it on the table.

'For the Queen,' cried three or four of the conspirators, simultaneously. 'For the Queen.' There was a sudden silence, all remained looking at the folded paper as though it were some living thing that could give answer to their questionings.

'How is it to reach her?' said Babington at length. 'Tutbury Fort is on the crest of a round hill set in the midst of a treeless plain—a hunting lodge surrounded by a

circuit of walls. Sir Amias Paulet guards her night and day. She may not write even to Elizabeth but through Walshingham.'

A murmur of despairing rage ran round the room, when suddenly a knock was heard at the door. Master Gilbert rose, and taking a paper from a servant, uttered a cry of joy.

'Gilbert Gifford is below,' said he, 'with important news. He has ridden post haste from Tutbury.'

'Gilbert Gifford,' cried Ballard. 'Admit him.'

In a few seconds there entered the room a young man splashed with mud and bearing on his person and clothes all the signs of hasty travel. He was about six-and-twenty years of age, his complexion was pale and freckled, his eyes hazel coloured, and his hair red.

Chidiock Tichbourne saluted him warmly and Ballard greeted him with the fervour of an old and trusted friend.

'Well, Father Gifford,' said Abington, 'what news?'

‘Master Gifford, good Abington, an it please you,’ said Bellamy. ‘Even among ourselves, it is not wise to mention titles so hastily.’

‘It matters little,’ said Gilbert Gifford. ‘I have carried my life too long in my own hands to tremble at an untoward word. The Queen has been removed to Chartley Manor.’

‘To Chartley Manor. When and how?’

‘Four days since, by special order of Walshingham, who suspecting nothing and moved by the constant entreaties of Her Majesty to allow her a better lodging, has played thus into our hands.’

‘By heaven!’ cried Babington ‘the hound has overrun the scent. Gifford, you have saved us.’

‘Saved thee, sir? How?’

‘Here is a letter from Mendoza,’ said Tichbourne, ‘which is to be delivered into the Queen’s own hands. At Tutbury such course were well-nigh impossible.’

‘It is very possible now,’ said Gilbert Gifford quietly, ‘for my father’s estate joins the Manor of Chartley. As a boy I roamed the chase and know every dingle. I could

find my way into the house blindfolded. Give me the letter and let me go.'

'Stay a moment,' said Tom Salisbury slapping his fist upon the table, 'it seems to me that all being equally committed to this business, we should each know as much of the other as convenient. But a few minutes since it was demanded of me that I should produce a sponsor for mine honesty. I ask in my turn to be introduced to the securities of this worthy servant of the Church, who rides like a cavalier and talks like an ambassador.'

'I will answer you, sir, and speedily,' said Gilbert Gifford, a slight colour rising to his pale brow. 'I am of fair family in Staffordshire and claim kin to the house of Throckmorton. My father George Gifford, has been imprisoned for the faith, my brother like myself is a priest, I have been since my childhood devoted to the cause. Father Ballard will answer for me.'

'That truly will I,' said Ballard in tones somewhat more tender than his usual speech, 'I have known thee from a boy and ever found thee true and loyal.'

‘And I will be another sponsor for thee,’ cried Savage. ‘I met thee in the Low Countries, and thou didst save me from some difficulty with thy influence with—’

‘We all know Father Gifford,’ said Tichbourne, ‘I myself will answer for his fidelity with my life if it needs be.’

‘God’s wounds,’ says Salisbury. ‘I regret my utterance. Thy hand, father!’ and he pressed the cold palm of the priest in his own strong fingers.

‘Enough! Enough!’ said Gifford smiling. ‘Thy doubts were but natural, and I am glad to satisfy them so easily. Now what of the letter?’

‘Thou shalt start with it to-morrow,’ said Babington, ‘and I will accompany thee. We will find some means to convey it to Her Majesty and will await the issue.’

‘Then we disperse,’ said Abington. ‘To meet at the old rendezvous in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.’

‘Faith,’ says Salisbury, ‘I am tired of waiting. What say you, Captain Savage.’

‘I have been tired for this seven years,’ said he almost furiously. ‘Why not make

an end of matters. Let us remove this Royal Beast that troubles the whole world.'

There was a silence at this very plain proposition for the assassination of their sovereign, and Ballard and Gifford looked at each other.

Gerrard who was on his side as prejudiced against the Catholic supremacy as the conspirators were against the heretic sovereign had much ado to stifle a cry.

'Here is news indeed,' said he to himself. 'The villains would murder the Queen. Walter Gerrard, this night's work will make thee a fortune or lose thee a head.'

Ballard seeing perhaps that the humour of the company was not yet hot enough for the serious touching of so dangerous a proposal, affected to rebuke the soldier.

'Thou art too hasty, good Captain Savage. It is by no means the wish of the Church to create public scandal. There are other ways of disposing of the bastard of the late infamous and murderous King Henry.'

'As by imprisonment, perchance,' said Savage, 'well, I am at orders in the matter, though, with all frankness, it seems to me

that religion will have no place in England so long as this pernicious woman rules us.'

'That will be as after events determine,' said Babington coolly. 'In the meantime, sir, your duty is, as I take it, to obey orders.'

'No man ever found me wanting in my duty,' returned Savage. 'What am I to do?'

'To remain at ease until thou hearest further,' said Tichbourne. 'This day week we shall meet again.'

The signal for breaking up the conference caused a general movement towards hats and cloaks. Gerrard hastened from his perilous position and gained the street and his chamber without accidents.

'And how hast sped, boy?' quoth Hum as he admitted the young man at the sign agreed on, 'didst find thy fair one to thy liking? I judge me so, as thou hast been paying thy devotions to her for some three hours. Why, thou art pale.'

'Captain Hum,' said Gerrard, who now that he had embarked with him so far felt that it would be the best policy to trust

his companion altogether, 'my business was no silly love adventure, but a matter of more serious import.'

'To tell the plain truth, my little *Miltiades*, I did so bethink me once or twice during thy absence,' returned Hum with great complacency, and as he spoke the clatter of horses' feet awoke the echoes of the street. The party were departing.

'I am on business of state,' said Gerrard.

'Business of state, sweet youth,' said the captain sitting up in his bed and resting his chin upon his bony knees, 'is reserved for bigger fellows than either of us. If you tell me that you are in the pay of either the Queen or the Pope, I shall understand your meaning.'

'Well,' said Gerrard, 'I am bound in service to a good master, and my business is honest.'

'I do not doubt thee, but a man like myself must know his general's name ere he enlist. Queen or Pope, I care but little so that pay be good and adventure plenty. I have fought on both sides in my time, ay, and would again, had an' occasion offered.'

‘You make frank confession,’ returned Gerrard laughing.

‘Why not!’ I was spitted through the ribs on St Bartholomew’s day by a blood-thirsty Lorrainer, and received three wounds in Antwerp on the night that Jaureguay shot the Prince of Orange. They took me for a Huguenot in Paris and for a Catholic in Holland. By the twenty-two thousand lips of the eleven thousand virgins of Cologne, I know not which be the worst, the Devil or Doctor Luther.’

‘Well I am for Dr Luther,’ said Gerrard, still laughing, ‘that is to say for the Queen and Walshingham.’

‘Thou art playing a risky game, comrade mine,’ rejoined Hum still nursing his knees, ‘and yet I am somewhat inclined to Walshingham inasmuch as he usually carries his point. A friend of mine described to me the raking of Somerville in the Tower and though the would-be regicide had received a special blessing from Father Hutton and wore an Agnus Dei round his neck, he nevertheless made a full confession.’

‘Torment will force any man to confess,’

said Gerrard hotly, 'and I hold it a misfortune that men use it.'

' 'Tis a misfortune, doubtless, but 'tis very solemn fact,' said Hum, 'and I have but little fancy for the Tower headsman and his thumbscrews.'

'But I am in the right,' quoth Gerrard, 'I would defend the Queen against traitors.'

'True, but supposing Mary was queen she would not thank you.'

'The more need that I should prevent her attaining that dignity.'

'Well!' laughed Hum, 'thou art a bold, boy, and I will not baulk thy humour! Thou art then in service with Walshingham!'

'I am.'

'Thy business?'

'For the present to obtain possession of a letter in cypher addressed to Mary of Scots, and in the possession of a man whom we shall meet to-morrow.'

'*Santa Maria!*—that will be no easy task, if the messenger knows his business.'

'He is a Jesuit priest, well mounted and armed, and will be accompanied by a

cavalier of similar mettle. Listen !' and he told him what he had heard.

'Comrade mine,' said Nicholas, after pondering over this intelligence, 'I would recommend thee to sleep, for we shall have a merry day's work to-morrow.'

And following out his own advice, he was presently snoring like a grampus.

Gerrard, occupied with his own thoughts, could not close an eye for some hours, and sinking at last into a confused and heavy slumber, awoke from a dream of Tom Salisbury struggling in the hands of the executioner, to find it was daylight, and the room empty.

CHAPTER VIII

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

HURRYING to the courtyard, he found the valiant Hum at his customary morning's occupation. All trace of seriousness had vanished from Nicholas' brow, and he was vigorously inspecting the bottom of a flagon.

'A pot of obarni,' cried he, waving an explanatory hand, 'which is an excellent compound of small beer and spice. I have given Mistress Joan the recipe in return for two hearty kisses, the which she was pleased to bestow upon me.'

'Marry, come up, captain. Thou hast more wit than truth in thee,' said the buxom scullion, not displeased with the rough courtesy of the stranger.

‘Ay sweet wench,’ returned Hum, ‘and more love than either. What says the ballad,

“My love has wealth and beauty,
The rich attend her door ;
My love has wealth and beauty,
But I, alas ! am poor.
The ribbon fair that binds her hair
Is all that’s left to me ;
While here I lie alone to die
Beneath the willow tree.”

‘Heigho !’

‘Now, by this light, Hum, hast no other work in hand than swilling of liquor, and fooling with a cook maid, cried Gerrard, who was not in the best of humours.

‘Softly, Miltiades, softly,’ returned Hum in his ear. ‘I am an old soldier, and an old soldier always secures his retreat under the cover of that excellent flag—a petticoat. I have seen the horses fed, and provided us with breakfast. Should it chance that your friends the Jesuits be too strong for us, I’ll warrant me that mistress Joan would make shift to open a kitchen window for love of this valiant man of war. Go to !

I was not born yesterday! Gerrardo
mio—

“My ale was tunned when I was young,
And a little above my knee,”

‘Sweet Joan, fare thee well! When next we meet thou shalt sup with me at the Mitre, and we’ll away to be married at the Savoy.’

‘Come,’ said Gerrard, pacified by the humour of his companion, ‘let us then to breakfast, for I bethink me that our friends will set out early on their way.’

‘It matters not,’ said Hum calmly. ‘They cannot go further than nightfall, and an we do not overtake them ere then, we might as well stop behind. I have discovered, sir, that neither man or beast travels faster on an empty belly. Landlord, a tankard for my comrade.’

‘Do your honours start early?’ inquired the host.

‘At once, at once!’ said Hum, with his mouth full of pie. ‘We go to Staffordshire.’

‘Indeed,’ said the landlord, ‘I have a

relative in that country, a brewer at Burton.'

'A brewer,' cried Hum, 'thou shalt give me a passport to him. I love brewers, they are the salt of the earth, the true apostles of salvation. The world was in darkness, heathen darkness, my jolly host, until Providence enlightened it with the mystery of brewing. A brewer, didst thou say? His name, his honoured name!'

'Furmity—Andrew Furmity of Burton-on-Trent,' said the tapster, inspired by this outburst, 'and thou I say it, as honest a man as any in the kingdom.'

'A fig for his honesty,' said Hum. 'His beer, so that it be sound, is more to my purpose. I will call upon him with thy good will.'

'Do so, gallant captain,' said the host, 'and use him freely.'

'Never fear me,' said Hum, and as Gerrard discharged the reckoning he whispered, 'Every lane has two ends to it, and we may as well have a friend in the enemy's camp—if indeed we are so lucky as to reach it.'

And so mounting their horses they rode down the hill.

‘Let us consider what is best to be done,’ said Gerrard. ‘Bethink thee, dear Hum, that we must proceed with caution.’

‘That is the worst of these secret missions,’ said Hum, ‘one is constrained to such uncommon deliberation. In the ordinary manner of public or private warfare, we should have merely to post ourselves at the corner of the road, attack these fellows, kill them and depart.’

‘Nay, by my faith,’ said Gerrard, laughing, ‘but you would make short work of them. Mayhap, moreover, they might kill us.’

‘Then would all difficulty as to the success of our enterprise be ended,’ quoth Hum with immense gravity.

‘My instructions were to privately copy the contents of the paper and let the bearer take it to its destination,’ said Gerrard. ‘It is all important that he should not suspect me.’

‘Then you must do it. But how?’

‘Put spurs to your horse and we will see

what manner of men we have to deal with. My advice is, to fall in with the travellers at their inn, request their company on the morrow and seek for some such opportunity to get possession of the letter as Providence may send. At the worst we may intercept the missive at Chartley.'

At about three in the afternoon they saw at the bottom of a hill a little tavern at the door of which two horsemen were mounting.

'We have them,' said Gerrard.

'Very good,' said Hum, 'then let us wait half-an-hour,' and producing a pipe and tinder box, he proceeded to enjoy the 'Indian weed' which had become a common luxury in England. Having very deliberately performed this exploit—puffing the smoke out of his nostrils, forcing it out of his eyes, and otherwise emitting it in strange rings, shapes and convolutions as was the practice of the time, he declared himself ready to start.

'Poor Meg,' said he with a sigh, as he dropped the box into his capacious pocket. 'This was the last of her gifts to me, for

her rascally husband shut up his shop last week and departed for the Indies. Alas !

“When Virtue was a country maid,
And had no skill to set up trade,
She came up with a carrier's jade,
And lay at rack and manger.

“She wiffed her pipe, she swigged her can,
The pot was ne'er out of her span,
She married a tobacco man,
A stranger ! A stranger !”

‘But there, hang folly ! Come on, lad.’

‘Thou whimsical knave,’ said Gerrard, as they neared the tavern. ‘Where in heaven's name didst thou pick up all thy score of verse ?’

‘By the sedulous frequentations of play-houses, ballad mongers' shops, poets' garrets, taverns and potting places where good fellows congregate,’ said Hum. ‘I am myself also a poor cultivator of the muses, and some of my ditties are not unknown in the various camps of Europe.

‘They set up shop in Honey-lane,
And thither flies did swarm amain,
Some from France, and some from Spain,
Brought in by sturdy panders.

At last this honey pot grew dry,
And both of them were forced to fly
To Flanders! To Flanders!

‘But here is our inn, with the host at the door airing his paunch.’

‘I prithee, sir,’ said Gerrard to the host, ‘did two cavaliers stop but now with thee?’

‘There were two, but an hour back,’ said the man. ‘They seemed in haste, stopping but to breathe their horses, then on.’

‘We have ridden too leisurely and missed them,’ said Hum. ‘But heaven is above all. Bring two pots of ale—two large pots, and harkee, landlord, fling thee in a nutmeg or a handful of cloves, or maybe a sprig of fennel, for I am somewhat choice in my liquor and of tender stomach.’ The host obeying, Gerrard took occasion to ask if the strangers had stated where they intended to pass the night.

‘There is but one inn between this and Stony Stratford,’ said the landlord, ‘and that is thirty miles off. I can give your honours the best of accommodation.’

‘Thirty miles,’ cried Hum. ‘Beshrew

me! a manchet of bread and thirty miles! *Another* pot of ale.'

'I fear we must push on,' said Gerrard. 'Nevertheless we will bit our nags for half-an-hour. So there is no inn nearer than thirty miles?'

'The Black Boar at Leighton Buzzard, kept by one Stinge, is the nearest house,' replied the man sulkily.

'I fancy that thou art not on the best of terms with *one Stinge*, worthy friend,' said Hum, emerging from the depths of his second pot. 'Thou dost not speak of him as one who lovest him over much.'

'I bear the man no ill-will,' said the tapster, 'though he *did* stand in the pillory for refusing to subscribe to the Queen's religion.'

Hum and Gerrard exchanged glances. It was evident that the Black Boar was a Catholic house, and that Master Stinge was a recusant of ill reputation amongst his Protestant neighbours.

'He was rightly served,' said Hum, clapping his hand on his sword hilt. 'An I had my way, I would serve all traitorous villains in like manner. Nevertheless we must be

at his house to-night if our friends choose to stop there, so prithee despatch.'

'It seems to me, comrade,' said Hum, when they were once more on their way, 'that we are going into somewhat warm quarters. Two Protestants, even such valiant soldiers as you and I, had best look to their ears, when they set out to catch a Jesuit, and have to sleep the first night of their adventure in the house of a pilloried recusant.'

'Pooh man, they'll not suspect us, never fear,' said Gerrard, with more bravado than easiness.

'If they don't cut me into collops and broil me as a relish for Beelzebub's breakfast, replied Hum pleasantly. 'But nevertheless, let us make trial of it.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLUE BOAR AT LEIGHTON BUZZARD.

THE Blue Boar at Leighton Buzzard was a huge rambling house which had been apparently used as a place of defence during the civil wars, for the walls were loopholed and each door strongly barred.

The inhospitable appearance of the place was enhanced by the aspect of the landlord. Master Stinge was a sullen blackavised fellow, with a swivel eye. His countenance, moreover, was rendered less pleasing than Nature made it by the loss of his ears, which had been cut off close to his head.

‘My accommodation is but scanty,’ said he, as the two travellers dismounted. ‘Ye had better push on to Stratford.’

‘Push on to old Nick!’ quoth Hum. ‘Body o’ me, this is a genial welcome for tired travellers.’

‘My house is in ill ease,’ returned Stinge, blocking the doorway, ‘as you may see, and moreover the ostlers have left me.’

‘I am myself an ostler of exceeding skillfulness,’ said Hum thrusting open the stable door.

‘But I have no beds!’

‘I can sleep anywhere,’ said Gerrard getting half into the doorway.

‘By Our Lady, but thou shalt not sleep *here* then,’ said Stinge.

‘Thou crop-eared son of perdition!’ roared Hum, lugging out his enormous Toledo, ‘Dost thou dare tell two valiant men, soldiers, gentlemen, and loyal subjects of good Queen Bess, that they shall not? By the Red Cow, but I will spit thee like a larded capon, and roast thee at thine own fire!’ and with a rapid attack he drove the man backwards and sprang into the house. ‘Come on!’ he whispered Gerrard, ‘this accident is as good as any, for ’twill bring our birds out of their nests. What,

thou flat-capped, blue-doubleted, herring-gritted, earless napkin-carrier, thou oppose me? House there! House ho!’

‘House ho!’ cried Gerrard, ‘House ho!’ and driving Stinge before them they burst into a room where the two men they sought were at supper.

The natural result followed. Babington and Gifford imagining that they were attacked whipped out their weapons. Stinge was hurled into a corner like a stone from a catapult, and in another instant the four gentlemen were thrusting away at each other for dear life. The combat was of very short duration.

At the third pass Gifford sent Hum’s sword flying across the chamber, and Gerrard seeing that Stinge had secured the weapon and was advancing to aid his friends, lowered his point.

‘Now, sir,’ said Babington, ‘who are ye, and why do ye burst thus in upon us.’

‘Travellers,’ said Gerrard ‘journeying to Staffordshire, and hearing from the landlord of the Bear, that two gentlemen had

gone on before us, we hastened to request the favour of their company.'

Babington looked at Gifford. 'Tis a strange fashion of request, sir, to burst in upon a man with drawn swords and hallooing.'

'Twas the fault of that cross eyed slop swilling mandrake yonder,' cried Hum. 'He refused us shelter—may he starve in the stocks. My rapier, thou ram-headed rascal, or I will give that nose of thine to the cur that hath thine ears in his belly.'

'Give the gentleman his weapon, good Stinge,' said Gifford. 'You must pardon us, sir, for so rude a welcome, but your entry was, you will admit, unceremonious. Pray, sit and partake. Stinge, bring supper for these gentlemen.'

'Cocksails,' says Hum, sheathing his recovered steel. 'But that is nobly spoken, sir, thou art a man, sir, I care not of whose begetting, and thy skill in fence is superior to my own. I will e'en carouse, a stoop of Rhenish to thine honour. Honest Stinge, forgiveness is a Christian virtue, exercise it and despatch.'

Babington taking his cue from his companion, courteously begged Gerrard to be seated. 'We too are bound for Stafford,' said he, 'and you shall have our company with all freedom. Master Stinge is rough in manner to strangers, for in good sooth his temper has been soured by certain misfortunes, but he is not so bad as he seems.'

'Thanks for your courtesy,' said Gerrard. 'So long as our ways be together, I shall be holden to you.'

'We make for Chartley Manor,' said Gilbert Gifford, who never told an untruth, unless for weighty reasons.

'I am bound for the same place,' said Gerrard, who had he been taken early into training, would have made a very excellent Jesuit. 'My kinsman, Sir Amias Paulet, has written for me to meet him there.'

Babington started, but Gifford said in a perfectly level tone,

'It has been thought that Sir Amias was at Tutbury Fort, with her that was the late Queen of Scotland.'

'I know not how that may be,' said

Gerrard, 'Perhaps the Queen has decided to remove Mary to a better lodging.'

'And your kinsman desires to give you employment in the guarding of so valuable a captive.'

'As it may chance; but the task likes me not,' said Gerrard.

The Jesuit exchanged a rapid glance with Babington. Nicholas Hum, who had opened his ears to the conversation, intercepted this glance and interpreted it to mean, 'This fellow will be useful,' and smiled internally.

'And does thy—ahem—friend accompany thee,' asked Gifford in a voice of syruppy sweetness.

'His—ahem—friend doth so,' quoth Hum, scornfully regarding the pair 'though he neither wears a gilt hilted rapier, nor a gold cable hat band! By all the horned heads from here to Moorfields, there's many a satin bellied canvas tacked swaggerer whose money was earned by standing with bare pate and dropping nose under a wooden pent house, crying "What d'ye lack!"'

'Nay! no offence, sir,!' returned Babington haughtily.

‘None under heaven!’ said Hum, twisting his moustache. ‘Though there may be a ruffler with a three piled ruff and a cloak of taffeta, who’s like an alderman’s nightgown faced with coney-skin before and nothing but fox within. So long as a man be a boon companion, a bully boy, and a valiant drinker, I care not a testoon if his father was a maltman and his mother sold gingerbread in Christchurch! But methought that this gentleman did pronounce the word *friend* with somewhat of a scornful accent, and though by the fortune of war, he has once disarmed me, yet I am by no means certain that in a second—.’

‘Come! Come!’ said Gifford smiling, ‘an thou wilt try another rally, it shall be after supper. Set down, good Stinge. Gentlemen, your healths, and remember we start at daylight.’

‘The liquor, methinks, is marvellous strong,’ said Hum, who according to his custom had taken an immediate and copious draught.

‘’Tis neat wine of Orleans,’ said Master Stinge. ‘If your honours like it not, I can

but offer my excuses. I told ye that the house was but ill furnished.'

'Nay, 'tis fair wine enough,' said Gerrard, unwilling to seem churlish to his host.

'Twill pass! 'Twill pass!' said Hum, whose frequent potations seemed to have had their effect. 'Let us look at the dish before thee, worthy sir! My belly crieth shame upon me for putting him off so long with mere liquids, and in the belly is a gentleman who is not to be lightly disregarded.

"Make room! Make room for the bouncing belly,
First father of sauce and denser of jelly,
Prime master of arts and denser of wit
Who found out that excellent engine the pit."

'Your health noble signors! May your wives ne'er unlatch ye, a grave never thatch ye, and Old Nick never snatch ye,—Amen.'

Sir Anthony Babington stared into the fire with the air of a man compelled to endure an annoyance he cannot affect to despise, and Gerrard fearful of his companion's tongue speedily made the tra-

veller's excuse of fatigue, and demanded his chamber.

'We start by daybreak, gentlemen,' said Gifford, 'so I prithee be stirring.'

'Ay,' stammered Hum, supporting himself on Gerrard's arm. 'Let us to bed !

' " Fill the cup, Philip, and let us drink a dram
Once or twice about the house, and leave where we began,
Fill thee—"

'Gerrardo ! 'tis my head that is drunk now.'

'May heaven confound the rascal's gluttony,' thought Gerrard, and gaining the chamber allotted to them, he dismissed Stinge, and deposited Hum on the mattress. 'Should there be a night attack, the fellow will be snoring like a porpoise. The manner of the amiable Gifford liked me not. I will wager my coming fortune that he is plotting something.'

So reasoning, he placed his naked sword on his bed, loosened his dagger and pistols, barricaded the door by drawing a settle across it, and blowing out his candle, sat up to await accidents.

But the excitement of the journey, the fatigue of the long ride, together with his sleeplessness of the night before operated upon his senses so powerfully, that the sword slipped from his knees upon the floor, and with a confused noise, as of the gallop of horses in his ears, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

HOW MASTER GILBERT GIFFORD GOT A DAY'S START.

It was considerably past daylight when Gerrard awoke. Barricade and armoury were still intact, but his head ached violently and his tongue felt like a piece of dried leather. A draught from the pitcher refreshed him and he turned to his companion.

But Hum was still snoring and no shaking could rouse him.

‘The villain’s drugged the wine!’ said Gerrard. ‘By my mother’s soul, but I’ll send Stinge’s nose to keep company with his ears,’ and furious he essayed the door. It was locked.

The two emissaries of Sir Francis Walshingham were caught like rats in a trap.

But Gerrard was not to be easily foiled. Drawing a pistol he blew the lock of the door to shivers; dashing the remainder of the water over Hum, who awoke spluttering, and ran downstairs.

The house was deserted.

A horrible thought clutched at Gerrard's heart, and he hurried to the stable. It was as he feared—the horses were gone.

'Fool that I have been,' cried he. 'I deserve this. But I will have vengeance. House, ho! Thieves! Thieves!' And he started to explore the premises.

Not a soul was visible. The rooms for the most part were all locked, and that in which they had supped on the night previous was still in the condition of disorder consequent upon their retirement. The chair which Hum had overturned, yet lay as it had fallen, and the remains of the supper still littered the table. It was as though a sudden panic had seized upon the household and every man had fled.

‘House ho!’ cried Gerrard, again, more bewildered than before. ‘Are ye all dead here?’

A sort of strangled whistle seemed to give answer, and following in the direction of the sound, Gerrard to his great surprise came upon the body of Master Stinge, bound and gagged.

‘Oh, your honour’s grace,’ said Master Stinge, when his speech was at liberty. ‘Such a night! Such a night!’

‘Explain villain,’ said Gerrard, ‘or I will make short work of thee! The wine thou gavest us last night was drugged.’

‘It may be, sir, but not by me. Sir, when your worships had retired to bed, there comes me to the door two cavaliers calling for shelter. No sooner did I parley with them, I averring that my house was already full, and my victual insufficient, than they assaulted me, and the other two gentlemen with whom your honour supped rushed out. The four are friends seemingly, and so all turn on me. They beat me, bind me and truss me thus.’

‘Oh thou spiteful villain,’ said Gerrard.

'Don't think to impose on me so lame a story. Thou and the damned villains thy masters, have poisoned us and stolen our horses.'

'I know nothing of thy horses,' said Stinge sullenly. 'I am bound as thou seest and could have no hand in it. If the men who were here last night know aught of thy business, follow them.'

'Ay, but not until I have seen thee safely lodged in the stocks, the which, please God, you will be 'ere noon, an there be a Justice of the Peace in Leighton Buzzard.'

'I am ready to answer for myself,' said Stinge.

Gerrard bit his lips. He saw how the skill of the smiling Gifford had enmeshed him. No doubt Stinge was ready—ready to stand in pillory a second time if need be. An accusation would probably procure a punishment, but it would certainly result in delay and possibly inquiry. Walshingham had very plainly told him the issue of any public scandal. 'If you are discovered,' said the Minister, 'I shall know nothing about you.' It was quite useless for him to hope

for aid from his patron or from the law. In such expeditions as that in which he was engaged, the law is not merely useless, but it is positively inimical. He had to shun the law, for the law means publicity.

‘Well, varlet,’ said he, with the air of a man partially convinced, ‘it may be as thou sayest. I will rouse my comrade and consider what course to take. Hast any servants here.’

‘None!’

‘Then I must borrow thy keys for awhile, for my companion is a thirsty soul and after his drugging will probably have a throat like a lime kiln. ’Twas lucky for me that I did not drink so freely.’

Leaving the landlord bound upon the floor, Gerrard bestowed a hearty kick upon his prostrate carcass and betook himself to his chamber.

He found Hum sitting on the bed, the picture of misery.

‘How dost feel, Hum!’

‘Dry as a Dutch commentator and hungry as a besieged city,’ returned Hum. ‘Pur-

sue the adventure thyself, lad. I am worse than a woman seven months wedded.'

'Well, here are the keys, bully boy,' said Gerrard. 'Stinge is tied neck and heels in the cellar, so carouse.'

'By the mass,' said Hum, stimulated to life by the news.

'“ But let's have a peal for John Crooke's soul,
For he was an honest man,
With the pottle pot and the jolly black bowl,
The tankard, and eke the can.”

'May I drink nothing but small beer for the rest of my days, if I do not ring the changes on this Popisher's sconce and drink to his speedy perdition on his own beer.'

'Listen to his story,' and Gerrard narrated it.'

'Lies! lies! tush, the little Jesuit has been too much for us, let us confess it. He beat me at swad play, and then at reasoning. 'Twas a scurvy trick to drug a gentleman's liquor, though beshrew me—what! is not a man to be secure in his hours of recreation, in his moments of self-ministration, when nature demanding reinforcement,

the gates of her citadel are opened to the bounteous baggage waggon of liquor, and a venison pasty—By my nief! 'tis monstrous! But where go you?'

'To buy, beg, or steal horses,' said Gerrard. 'Get you to breakfast, I'll be back anon.'

The inn was on the outskirts of the village, which consisted of about half-a-dozen houses. Gerrard inquired up and down, threatened sword, and entreated, there was not a horse to be had for love or money. 'I must get to Stony Stratford,' said he to himself, 'if I ride upon a cart mare.'

Just then looking back on the road he had travelled, he saw in the distance a gleaming speck of white. It was a boy riding a grey mare, and leading another, and he was approaching the inn. Gerrard hastened forward. 'I'll have those horses at any price,' said he to himself. The boy rapidly neared him, but no sooner did he perceive a man advancing towards him than he pulled up.

Gerrard began to run. So soon as the boy saw this, he turned his nags' heads round. They were two fine animals, a bay and a grey. Gerrard waved his hat.

The boy at this signal backed his own steed into the hedge, and deliberately drew a large pistol from his holster.

'The devil!' said Gerrard. 'He guesses my intention,' and he drew his own dag or belt pistol.

'I want to speak with thee, lad,' he cried.

'Speak from where thou art then,' cried the boy.

'I want to buy your horses.'

'They are not mine.'

'Your master's horses then.'

'My master will not sell them.'

'I will give you twenty crowns to let me take them.'

'I am not a thief.'

'*Fifty* crowns.'

'I shall fire if you come nearer.'

'But listen, I am a gentleman travelling on a mission of importance. I have been robbed of my horses. There are none in the

village. I *must* go to Stratford. Let me ride with you that far.'

'Not a mile,' said the boy with provoking coolness. 'I too have business of importance.'

'Nay, by this light,' said Gerrard, waxing out of patience. 'But as you refuse to help me, I will myself,' and he fired his pistol with such good intent that the bullet cut the groom's single feather from his bonnet.

The lad uttered a cry, fired and missed.

The horses plunged, and Gerrard drawing his sword rushed in and caught the animals by the bridles.

'So you have turned highwayman, have you?' said the lad removing his short torn beaver, and showing the golden curls of Master Gilbert.

'Master jeweller's apprentice,' said Gerrard who was boiling with rage, 'you are playing a very dangerous game, why this masquerading?'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that jewellers' apprentices seldom ride blood horses.'

'They are my master's.'

'Then your master crossed London Bridge

yesterday on the grey nag, and dressed like a cavalier,' returned Gerrard, who recognised Ballard's hackney. 'Come, dismount.'

'This is fine villainy,' cried Gilbert, 'you shall answer for this.'

'I will in my own time and convenience,' returned Gerrard coolly.'

'You would have assassinated me,' said the goldsmith's apprentice.

'I am by no means sure that a bullet through thy brains would not save thee from a worse fate hereafter,' said the other coolly. 'But come, walk thou before me to yonder inn.'

The boy reluctantly obeyed, and with the reins of the captured horses on his arm, Gerrard followed. Hum was awaiting them, his customary tankard in hand.

'Welcome, noble *cabelleros*,' he cried. 'Ah! my little flat-cap hast thou run from thine indentures with thy master's horses? I have no sympathy with runagates.'

'Ye are a pair of cozening knaves,' said the lad hotly, 'and maybe your ears will be nailed to a pillory for this. Master Stinge! Master Stinge!'

‘Pipe on, little one,’ returned the captain, ‘thy Stinge will not dance for thee.’

‘Hast not loosened him?’ asked Gerrard.

‘By no means,’ said Hum. ‘I rather tightened his bonds, which, to say truth, were very tenderly placed upon him. I then administered some chastisement with a stirrup leather, preached him a short discourse on the sinfulness of drugging good liquor, commended his soul to Satan, and left him.’

Master Gilbert could not forbear a smile at this description.

‘Your occupation is a dangerous one, gentlemen,’ said he.

‘Mind thine own business, friend,’ quoth Hum calmly. ‘Thy position is far more dangerous, in my opinion.’

‘Tie him up with the other,’ said Gerrard, ‘and let us be off.’

‘No, surely thou will not do me that indignity,’ said the lad flushing crimson.

‘By Saint Paul, but I will do just that which is ordered me and more,’ said Hum, and seizing the boy by the arm, he dragged him into the house.

Gerrard led the horses into the stable, and was about to follow when he heard a shriek and a roar.

The next instant the boy dashed out, a drawn poignard in his hand, pursued by Hum with his immense Toledo.

'The viper stabbed me in the arm,' cried he. 'Stop him!'

The jeweller's apprentice rushed into Gerrard's arms, and whispered something in his ear.

'Stand back,' cried Gerrard striking up the captain's weapon.

'What now,' exclaimed Hum in amazement.

'As you are an honourable gentleman, Walter Gerrard,' said the boy, and fainted in the young man's arms.

'Fore God, this is lovely business,' said Gerrard, glancing alternately at the bleeding and infuriated captain, and the slight figure which he supported.

'I tell thee, man, he stabbed me,' roared Hum.

'He,' said Gerrard, 'Why man, 'tis a woman.'

CHAPTER XI.

CHARTLEY MANOR HOUSE.

CHARTLEY MANOR, the house of the young Lord Essex, was large, roomy, and well defended; being surrounded by water and battlemented. Moreover, it was but twelve miles from Tutbury, and this was of no small merit in the eyes of Sir Amias Paulet.

The imprisoned Mary had long been clamorous to be removed. The fact was that Tutbury was too well guarded. Communications with France were nearly impossible, and between the recall of M. Maurissière and the appointment of M. de Chasteneuf as ambassador, there was no French Minister in London. This

interval had been seized upon by Walshingham to close the last avenue to her sister's heart which Mary possessed. Though Maurissière was not to be trusted to possess State secrets, yet through him Mary had felt that she had independent access to Elizabeth's private ear. When she was informed that in consequence of the absence of the French Minister all letters must go through Walshingham, she understood that her schemes were at an end, and eager to vent her spleen on any excuse, wrote violently complaining of the discomforts of Tutbury, and demanding a change of residence.

To the surprise of everybody in her confidence, the Secretary immediately consented.

Nobody, perhaps, was more astonished at this consent than Sir Amias Paulet himself. He wrote to Walshingham and pointed out the advantages of Tutbury as a prison. Walshingham's reply was to direct him to examine a house which had been forfeited from one John Gifford, who had been executed for recusancy.

The honest Amias despatched three successive posts bearing remonstrances. The Giffords had adherents in every cottage; the house was honeycombed with secret doors, and the windows opened into the garden, and the garden was difficult to guard.

Walshingham's reply was an imperative order for the removal of the imprisoned Mary to Chartley.

Whither she went in almost regal state, together with her secretaries, maids and suite, and followed by one hundred carts containing her baggage and apparel. Her apartments were well furnished, and her comfort sedulously looked to. Walshingham sent word that his only wish was to serve her.

Sir Amias Paulet was disgusted at this conduct. 'It looks as if they wanted her to escape,' said he to himself.

CHAPTER XII.

A D A N G E R O U S R I D E.

GERRARD and his ally stood gaping at one another, until the disguised lady put an end to the dilemma by opening her eyes.

‘Where am I?’ asked she.

‘Who art thou, my linnet! It is a question more to the purpose, methinks,’ remarked Hum.

‘You are safe,’ said Gerrard, with respect, ‘but let me hope—’

‘Hope nothing,’ said the girl. ‘Had you injured me, a dozen gentlemen would have avenged me, and amply.’

‘I make no doubt of it,’ said Hum. ‘But fifty dozen gentlemen could not put life into that pretty little carcass, if my blundering weapon had let it out.’

‘Peace, Nicholas,’ said Gerrard. ‘Look thee to our horses, for we may have the village upon us.’

‘That thou mayest look to the wench, I suppose,’ muttered Hum in his beard. ‘By the hilt of my Sunday dagger, but she seems not averse to him. He bows—he smiles. Heigho—’tis by these signs that an onlooking man knows himself no longer a youth.’

‘Madam,’ said Gerrard, who felt his heart beat with a somewhat new sensation, ‘I know not by what name to address so fair a lady.’

‘Tush!’ said the unknown, ‘quit compliment. You want my horses.’

‘I would not steal them,’ said Gerrard, ‘but I must have them.’

‘On whose service?’

‘The Queen’s.’

‘Master Gerrard you are playing a very dangerous game.’

‘By cock and pye, sweet lady, but thou art playing one more dangerous still,’ said Gerrard, almost surprised out of caution.

‘What mean you?’ said she turning pale.

‘A woman who disguises herself as a jeweller’s apprentice, and gallops on horse-back over London, is surely doing dangerous work.’

‘My husband needs my assistance, sir, she returned with an arch look.

‘Thy husband!’ cried Gerrard, and bit his lip.

‘Thou needst not say the word in so melancholy a tone, Master Walter,’ said she, laughing; ‘come, let us be friends.’

She gave him her hand and he raised it to his lips.

‘Enough, sir, enough! Now, let us be practical. You want my horses—good. I will give them to you on one condition.’

‘Name it!’

‘That you do not seek to follow me or seek out who I am.’

‘Is it in humanity to make such a promise?’

‘You must make it, nevertheless. Come, Master Walter, *good* Master Walter—for I rather like thee—I am travelling on real need. It is neither the part of a gentleman or a soldier to pry into a woman’s

secret. Mount and go, and—well, if we ever meet again, I will not refuse to recognise thee.’

‘If thou art ever in need of me,’ said Gerrard, cutting with his dagger a knot of grey ribbon from his doublet, ‘send me this, and count on my assistance.’

The unknown took the ribbon and put it into her bosom. The eyes of the pair met, and they blushed.

‘Until we meet,’ said she, and turned into the house.

‘May that be soon,’ said he, and hurried to the horses.

‘Who is she, in the name of all Mahomet’s hours?’ asked Hum, as they dashed down the hill.

‘I don’t know,’ said Gerrard.

‘What is she then?’

‘A conspirator, I am afraid.’

Hum checked his horse with so violent a jerk, that the beast’s tail scattered the dust of the roadway.

‘Gerrardo, unless you fall in love with that woman, the conspiracy is doomed.’

‘But if I do fall in love with her,’ said Gerrard laughing.

‘Then ’tis you that are doomed, and I will toss up my cap and cry, “Long live Mary the Second.”’

‘Why so!’

‘Why so! Because, oh best of Gerrardos, the devil—who is an old doctor—has many ways of entrapping the souls of women, but when he sets his gin for one worth the winning, he barts it with political conspiracy.’

‘And not with a handsome face.’

‘Oh, ignorantest of youths, no! *That* line is for men. Women care not for beauty—belike for that they know how easily it can be feigned. Believe me, your ugly schemers, with silent lips, stern eyes, and the temper of old Beelzebub himself, have betrayed more wenches to ruin, than a dozen of smooth chinned popinjays, who are ever soft in their voices and *point device* in their accoutrements.’

‘Thou art learned in the ways of women, Nicholas.’

‘Not so! I but comprehend the vastness

of my ignorance. Since the day I was knee high to a goose, I have read me of much knowledge by judicious experiment in all countries.'

'“ I've wandered thro' all Germany
Thro' Switzerland and Italy,
Made love in old Jerusalem,
And kissed in sunny Spain.”

'But hold, here comes a troop of cavaliers riding for salvation. Babington heads them. Now, boy, we have an account of our horses—charge.'

And the two gentlemen dashed down the road at a furious gallop, and tore through the opposing body of horsemen like bullets through a cornfield.

'My horse!' cried Gerrard, attacking Babington.

'My horse!' roared Hum, attacking three assailants at once.

'We were coming to your rescue,' cried Babington. 'Down with your arms, gentlemen; you are in error.'

'Sound a parley, then,' said Nicholas, calmly reloading his pistols, while he held his naked sword between his knee and the

saddle; 'I am prepared for all reasonable explanation, so that it be accompanied by my horse.'

'We were beset last night, sir,' said Babington to Gerrard, 'by robbers or outlaws, as I hold, and forced to save our lives by flight.'

'It is to be regretted, sir, that you did not think good to warn *us*,' returned Gerrard with equal courtesy. 'We could have aided you and your comrade—whom I see is not with thee—in resisting attack.'

'Faith, the shots would have wakened any man who had a taste for combat,' sneered Babington.

'And had not a taste for drugged wine, eh?' cried Hum. 'Beshrew me, but I have yet Vulcan's stithy in my belly. Hist,' he added aside to Gerrard, 'the other has gone on with the letter. This is a trick to entrap us.'

'Well, sir, an if this be true,' said Gerrard, backing his horse out of the press, 'what is your will with us?'

'We purposed to give you assistance, it needful, and to bring thee under the con-

voy of this honest gentleman, the Mayor of Banbury, to the identification of the two villains whom he shrewdly suspects of the assault upon us.'

'How, in the Fiend's name, can we identify, when we were asleep?' asked Hum, coolly replacing his pistols, and resting the point of his sword on his boot toe.

'But ye may have met the varlets before time,' said the head of the train bands of Banbury—a little fat man girt with a belt which was so tight that it bisected his black and yellow livery, giving him the appearance of a wasp.

'Thou buff banded booby,' roared Hum. 'Dost thou charge me with being a highway robber? Ride on to the den from which we have escaped by virtue of Protestant valour and examine the crop-eared son of perdition who would have poisoned us. *My* business presses! Make way, I say.'

'That horse,' cried Babington, whose attention was attracted to the animal which Nicholas bestrode. 'How came you by that horse?'

‘Bought him for two rix dollars, off a gipsy in St Giles, and will not sell him for thy Manor of Picthatch.’

‘Insolent knave,’ cried Babington, exasperated by the insult, and drawing a pistol, sent a bullet through the poetical captain’s hat.

‘Fire and Faggots! Charge,’ roared Hum.

‘In the Queen’s name,’ cried Gerrard, and wheeling his horse, he rode straight at the only opposing body—the valiant Mayor of Banbury.

Pistol shots cracked, swords flashed out, dust was whirlwinded on high, and in ten seconds, Gerrard and his comrade, were galloping for the next town, with something little short of an army at their heels.

‘This will never do, Miltiades,’ said Hum. ‘We shall have the whole country side raised against us.’

‘What dost advise?’ said the other as they swept along.

‘To separate! or better use Polish policy.’

‘Polish policy! What mean you?’

‘When the suitor of our gracious Majesty was King of Poland, I served with him.’

‘Well!’

‘In that country there are wolves!’

‘I know it.’

‘These wolves pursue travellers.’

‘Well!’

‘The travellers are endangered because the wolves are hungry.’

‘Go on, in heaven’s name.’

‘The hunger of the wolves is made the safeguard of the travellers.’

‘How is that?’

‘They agree to sacrifice one of their number.’

‘Horrible.’

‘Not at all, only necessary. The wolves stop to devour the victim and the travellers escape.’

‘Then your plan.’

‘’Tis to sacrifice *me*.’

‘Hum, thou art an ass.’

‘By no means, Gerrardo, but a valiant gentleman of invention and courage. The object of our journey is to obtain the letter from the Spanish Minister. That is safe in

the doublet of Gilbert Gifford, who by his devilish machinations has got a day's start of us. Babington has been left behind to stop our progress. He's nought without his Mayor and Constables. They will be satisfied with one prisoner. Let them take me then, and do you ride on.'

'It seems to me,' said Gerrard in disgust, 'that the fate of our expedition is sealed. Let me give up *myself*, return to Walsingham, and confess myself a gull.'

'By no means dream of so rash an action. The priest thinking all is safe, to Banbury will ride easily. Dive down some of these valleys, and strike the highway further on.'

'Tis undoubtedly the best plan. But you—'

'Will sup with thee in three days at the house of our jolly brewer of Burton. Tush man, don't think that I, Nicholas Hum, captain of musketeers, lieutenant of horse, bully boy and *bon camarado* who speaks all tongues, fights with all weapons, and can drink Pharaoh and his host to dry ground am afeared of a springald like young Sir

Anthony Babington, and a gooseberry bellied knave like the Mayor of Banbury. 'By the head piece of Goliah! No!'

'But,' said Gerrard, 'we have gained on them.'

'The more reason to improve thy advantage,' returned Hum, coolly dismounting. 'Take thou both horses and ride as if the Black Death were a croup until you are ten miles the other side of Banbury.'

So saying, he stepped into the middle of the roadway, placed his pistols in his belt, wrapped his cloak about his arm, took his dagger in his left hand, and his sword in his right, and straightened himself into an attitude of a defence.

'*Dieu est a moy!* As we used to say in the Forty-five,' shouted he. 'Au revoir, Gerrardo.'

"For Cicely is a lovely lass
And her bosom as white as sno-ow."

'Come! Bustle thee boy! bustle!'

Gerrard hearing the sound of horses' feet, galloped off with a dismal feeling, that

though he was doing his best for his master, he might not see his gallant comrade again; and his horse having recovered wind, soon carried him out of ear shot of Hum's defiant carol.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOX AND WEASEL.

WALTER GERRARD skirted Banbury safely and regained the road at the little hamlet of Compton Verney. There he changed horses, pleaded a despatch from the Queen, crossed the Avon, and galloped into Tamworth as night fell.

He was tired, hungry, and furious, in no mood to make diplomatic inquiries, and turned into the first inn yard which stood open.

The place was little better than a hovel, and the stable a mere barn. A horn lantern revealed in this latter the figure of a boy rubbing down a horse.

Gerrard uttered a cry of delight. The horse was Gifford's.

‘I want stabling here,’ said he, and proceeded forthwith to litter down the nags with fern and straw.

The boy stared, grinned, and went on grooming.

‘A fine horse,’ said Gerrard, pointing to the bay which had carried the ingenious Gilbert.

‘He be and ha’ been na hard ten,’ said the boy.

‘Mayhap I shall find the rider within,’ hazarded Gerard.

‘Ay and abed,’ returned the lad. ‘He seemed as beat as his horse.’

‘So much the better,’ thought Gerrard, and carrying his arms in his hands went down into the inn parlour. There was no one there but an old woman, the mother of the stable lad.

‘The measter had gone to Stratford,’ she said, ‘and they seldom had visitors but on fair days. Another cavalier was above in the best chamber, but if the gallant gentleman would be content with an attic—’

No suspicion *here* evidently.

Gerrard ordered a tankard of ale and a

toast, hummed the butt end of a song, inquired the way to Sutton Coldfield because he did not want to go there, and was presently eating ham and eggs as if for a wager.

Having learned as much about the house as he could, he yawned and demanded his room. It was an attic, and as he silently climbed the stairs past the priest's apartment, he could hear a sonorous snoring.

'I'll have the letter to-night or kill him,' said he.

He waited until midnight, and then, having taken off his boots and doublet, clutched his poignard in his left hand, and crept down the attic stair.

There was a bright moon, and he could see that Gifford's door was ajar.

He pushed it and it opened noiselessly. The Jesuit was lying on his back sleeping as peacefully as an infant. There was not even an attempt at defence against attack. His sword and pistols were together on a chair at some distance from the bed. Under his head was his doublet, and from out the inner pocket of the doublet peeped

the white corner of a letter. To Captain Nicholas Hum, all this innocence would have seemed very suspicious, but our adventurer was new to such work, and smiling with delight, he gripped his dagger and advanced on tip-toe.

Once the door creaked and the sleeper moved. Once as Gerrard gently pulled at the letter he winked his eyes. Had he opened them, Gerrard who had the dagger at his throat, would have pinned him to the bolster. But he smiled as though in a dream and slumbered again. Gerrard clutching the letter, stole like a ghost to his attic. Here he relit his candle, pulled forth pen and paper, and took a hurried transcript of the despatch which simply consisted of four lines of cypher upon a single sheet of parchment. This was Morgan's new cypher, which was thought sufficient to baffle all Christendom, and which he had just invented for Guise, Mendoza, Paget and the Archbishop of Glasgow. The operation of transcription did not occupy one hundred seconds, and Gerrard stood again in the priest's chamber.

He had not moved. The packet was restored to its place, and our adventurer crept back exultant.

‘Now for London,’ said he, as he pushed the copy procured with so much difficulty into a slit in his under jerkin. ‘For London and fortune.’ And breathing like one who has successfully achieved a long sought for success, he fell asleep.

No sooner had the young man gone out of the room than Gilbert Gifford opened his eyes, and laughed very long, heartily, and silently.

The aspect of this silent laughter was not comely. It was hideous and inhuman. As the man sat there in the moonlight with his white teeth, white skin, pale hair, and pale eyes, he looked like a corpse revived, or one who has become a corpse—*perinde ac cadaver* for the accomplishment of some fell purpose.

Having had his laugh out, however, he did not go to sleep as Gerrard had done. On the contrary he rose, dressed himself, went noiselessly downstairs, went straight to the window near which he had eaten

his supper of the previous night, pushed it, opened it, (for it was unclasped) made his way to the stable, took out his horse, saddled him, and rode leisurely out of the village.

At a place called Ogshall, four miles from Tamworth, stood a ruined mill, which came very nigh being mentioned by Shakspear. Underneath this mill, and outlined with it against the sky, stood the figure of a horseman, wrapped in a cloak.

Gifford approached this man who held out his hand.

‘Here,’ said Gifford, and drawing his poignard, he unscrewed the head of it, and took out a thin slip of parchment.

‘Unsuspected?’ said the man.

‘Unsuspected!’ said Gifford.

The horseman buttoned his cloak, set spurs to his horse and galloped off; as he drew bridle along the rough ground he muttered ‘Liar.’

Gifford who remained watching the horseman until he checked his steed, said to himself ‘Fool!’

It was plain that these two did not thoroughly trust each other.

When Gerrard came down from his attic, though it was just daybreak, he saw Gifford heaping straw up to his horse's belly.

'Ah!' said Gifford, 'and we meet again. I trust you were not awakened by the robbers.'

'No,' said Gerrard, 'but they stole my horses.'

'My companion insisted upon going back to assist you.'

'And mine insisted upon stopping to assist *him*.'

'You speak in enigmas.'

'It is for you to interpret them.'

'Let us interpret over some breakfast,' said Gifford quietly. 'My way of life is honest and open. Let me hope that yours be also, then shall we need neither riddles nor reading. I journey to Chartley to-day, and will be glad of thy company as thou goest thither.'

'I am in haste,' quoth Gerrard, who was on thorns to be galloping to London, 'and would fain push on.'

‘So be it,’ said Gifford. ‘But thou wert in huge eagerness for my company two days back. However here is Mistress Ninian with her rashers.’

The men proceeded, Gerrard casting ever and anon uneasy glances at his companion as though he would fain discover from his expression if any suspicions haunted him. But the face of Gilbert Gifford was a mask. He ate and drank sparingly and slowly, now and then pausing to ejaculate some commonplace remark about the weather, the wind, or the excellence of home cured bacon.

It would appear that the business of the robbers had vanished from his mind altogether. A stranger would have taken the two men to be intimate friends who had long ago exhausted all topics of interest.

Gerrard began to feel an instinctive terror of this smooth-mannered priest. ‘If I thought that he suspected me,’ said he to himself, ‘I’d waylay him and kill him like a calf.’

The sentiment was a blood-thirsty one, but a man who is engaged in unravelling

a conspiracy has not time to reason himself out of his natural savagery. Walter Gerrard felt that a plain statement of the discourse he had heard at Master Bellamy's would be an excuse for the deaths of fifty Giffords.

'Thou seemest meditative,' said Gifford sullenly. 'I trust that thou dost not harbour ill thoughts towards me.'

'What dost thou mean, sir?' cried Gerrard flushing hot crimson beneath the priest's smile.

'Only that as thou didst stare at me savagely seemingly without seeing me, and then bend thine eyes upon the ground, and shift thy sword hilt round to thy hand, I did suspect me of some ill intent in thy soul. Out with it, man, if thou harbourest aught.'

'I confess I like not thy looks, sir,' said Gerrard, bewildered at this brisk attack.

'Dost thou not think in all honesty, sir, that I have less reason to like thine? Thou and thy companion burst into an inn where my friend—a noble gentleman of merit and standing—and myself are lodging. You

attack us sword in hand, we defeat you, man to man, supper heals all bruises and—'

'And you drug us and steal our horses.'

'We did in self-defence. I have urgent business in Chartley, and I brook not to be followed by men who from their manner and bearing might be thieves or spies.'

'Spies of whom.'

'Of Sir Francis Walshingham.'

'You speak boldly, sir,' said Gerrard, utterly astonished and feeling that the wily Jesuit had artfully provoked him into quarrel.

'Sir, I speak simply. You say that you are a gentleman, I will attest your assertion. My companion Sir Anthony Babington, journeys to Stafford to kiss the hands of the prisoner, Mary of Scotland. I am his confessor the son of a man who owns Chartley Manor. My name is Gilbert Gifford, I am a priest of the "Society of Jesus."'

Gerrard started back positively overawed by the calm power with which Gifford made his declaration.

'Now, sir, if you are a gentleman you

will sheath your sword and part company, if you are a spy—let us fight and I will kill you !’

It would be curious to analyse the varying sensations which the utterance of these words created in the minds of the two men.

Gifford thought, ‘*I know* he is a spy. *I know* he has been upon my track. I have told him nothing new, but I have effectually got rid of him, for he cannot in decency seek to accompany me, and he cannot afford to get killed until he has delivered his precious packet.

Gerrard thought, ‘He is utterly unsuspecting, he confides in my honour, and—I *have got his letter.*’

‘Sir,’ said he bowing, ‘you have done me honour in confiding in me, I serve the Queen, but I have no orders to stay your passage now. It would ill beseem me to offer advice to a person of the consideration of Sir Anthony Babington, but my kinsman, Sir Amias Paulet is a guardian who ill brooks interference.’

‘The visit which the young man goes to pay is made with the consent of Sir Amias,

said the priest calmly, and taking a paper from his pocket, he showed Gerrard the well-known signature of his uncle. 'Tis a farewell, sir, my pupil goes abroad in a few weeks. He is in no danger, 'tis only I.' The mental observations which had been made at the Mill that morning were repeated.

'You consummate liar,' thought Gerrard as he bowed low.

'You consummate fool,' thought Gifford, as he lifted his guileless eyes to the ceiling.

'Pass on your way, sir, until next we meet,' said Gerrard. '*Then* remember we meet as strangers.'

They parted. Gifford saddled his horse and rode off at a smart pace towards the north. Gerrard waited, burning with impatience for an hour, then headed back the road he had come at full gallop. As he passed a clump of beeches near, one of his horses neighed, but intent upon his own joyful thoughts, he did not look round.

He would have seen nothing even if he had looked; but so soon as he had dis-

appeared Gilbert Gifford walked his horse out of the thicket.

‘As I thought, he is galloping to London. Treachery must be met with Treachery—Master Walshingham!’ and laughing his silent laugh, he set his nag on to a canter and rode back to Compton Verney.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LINE OF POSTS.

GERRARD skirted Banbury and never drew rein until he reached the inhospitable mansion of Stinge. The moment he clapped his eyes on it, he was off again like a wily pike in a pool. The window commanding the road was wide open, and sitting in the entrance smoking was John Savage.

Gerrard ate a manchet of bread at Broughton, at Brockeldy procured a tankard of strong beer, a rasher, and a feed for his horses. 'I will sleep at Stony Stratford,' said he. But as he was about to ride into the yard he heard a laugh which made him start, and recognised John Gage, pitching quoits with Charnock.

‘The inns are garrisoned,’ thought he, ‘I must push on to Leighton Buzzard.’

He reached that place at near midnight, and with difficulty roused the grooms and procured a lodging. At daylight he was in the stable, and saw Captain Fortescue, otherwise Father Ballard, looking intently at the grey hackney.

‘Good - morrow,’ said Ballard, with a military air, ‘that is my horse.’

‘On the contrary,’ said Gerrard boldly, ‘he is mine. I bought him at Newport Pagnell for seven pieces, and a bay jennet to boot, from a traveller with grey eyes and red hair who styled himself Gifford and was travelling to Stratford.’

‘Um!’ said Ballard biting his beard. ‘It may be that I have done thee wrong. I certainly *lent* my steed to such a gentleman, but—’

‘Bones o’ me,’ cried Gerrard, who had taken advantage of the discussion to saddle his own beast. ‘Thou mayest have him for the same money, and as good a beast as the one I parted with. He is tender

on the near fore foot from clumsy shoeing and somewhat slow for my purpose.'

'Thou art in haste then,' said Ballard.

'I am,' returned Gerrard, backing his own horse or rather Hum's out of the low doorway. 'Here, ostler, there is a crown for thee. Look after the grey nag until this time to-morrow, when, if I appear not, sell him, and content thee.'

'Stop sir,' said Ballard, (half drawing his sword). 'Thou art no honest man.'

'Go to perdition!' returned Gerrard, plunging his rowels into the bay horse and scattering the muck midden as he charged the wall. 'I will breakfast at St Alban's,' said he, tightening his belt.

But at St Alban's he met with still further surprise.

Abington was flying a young hawk at the line, and Telney was fighting cocks on the grass plot.

'They have guarded the road,' muttered Gerrard with a curse. 'It would be the height of folly to leave a trail which Ballard can follow at a gallop.'

So spurring his fretted horse, he dashed

across the fields to a hamlet known as North Mimes, which consisted of seven houses and the stocks.

Here he found some sour ale, musty hay, and ewe mutton, and cursing more profusely than before, topped Highgate Hill at sunset.

As he almost guessed, swinging on the chain round the inn grass plot, and polishing his sword hilt, was Tom Salisbury.

‘It now but needs for me to meet my little mistress to show me that I must ride into Kent to make for Staffordshire,’ thought he.’

He did not meet her however, but passing Southampton House an hour later, he saw sitting by a low window, and singing a French love song to a lute, Chidiock Tichbourne.

‘I would give my left hand to know to whom the bejewelled monkey is warbling,’ said Gerrard in a rage.

Just then he was jostled by two cavaliers, who were riding in different directions. These gentlemen exchanged greetings across his body.

‘Ho, Travers!’

‘What, Charnock!’

‘May the foul fiend take all Jesuits,’ muttered Gerrard to himself. ‘My brain is turning,’ and dashing in his bloody spurs, he rode regardless of all entreaties and expostulations straight forward until he reached Sion House.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RESULT OF THE JOURNEY.

WALSHINGHAM appeared as Gerrard entered the apartment. 'Well,' said he. Gerrard held out the packet with the air of a man who answers all questions. The Secretary took it and glanced at the parchment. 'You have done very well,' said he, 'how did you get this?'

Gerrard recounted the particulars of his journey, omitting however, all mention of his discovery of the sex of Master Gilbert, and finished by narrating how he had noted the sentinels along the road.

To his great surprise, Walshingham did not seem to take much heed of this important intelligence, but said only, on the conclusion of the narrative :

‘Where is your comrade?’

‘I’ the stocks at Banbury, belike,’ said Gerrard hotly, ‘I deemed it my duty to return at once.’

‘You did right, but we must not leave this trusty fellow to come to ill. Here is a safe conduct for ye both. Seek him out and release him.’

‘Is that all?’ said Gerrard rising.

‘Oh! I had forgotten,’ said Walshingham, who never forgot anything, ‘your pay,’ and ringing a bell as he spoke Phillips appeared. ‘See this gentleman rewarded and well bestowed, Master Phillips, he has had a perilous adventure and hard riding since last you met him.’

‘I meant not *pay*,’ cried Gerrard, stamping his spurred foot upon the floor. ‘Has my errand been successful. If so, a word of praise. Methinks—’

‘It has not been *wholly* successful, sir,’ returned the Minister in his softest tones. ‘This paper though doubtless of some interest is *not* the letter I sent you for.’

‘*What!*’

‘God rest you, sir. Good-night!’ and the Fox disappeared.

‘What jugglery is this, Master Phillips?’ cried Gerrard in amaze. ‘I took it from his very body.’

‘Maybe,’ returned Master Phillips in his funereal tones. ‘But Gilbert Gifford is not absolutely a fool. However, you did your best, and it matters but little, for we have the right paper.’

‘You have the right paper! Impossible!’

‘Not at all. Did you notice a sorrel mare in the courtyard as you entered.’

‘Yes!’

‘The rider of that mare brought the letter eighteen minutes since.’

Gerrard swore for the thousandth time that day. ‘I will kill the rider of that mare then’

‘Nay! nay, good Master Walter, say not so, for ’twas I,’ said Phillips smiling like a curdling milk plan. ‘But come and sup with me, for we have a long journey to make to-morrow. Hush! hush I beg thee; Sir Francis likes not to hear profane oaths in his ante-chamber.’

CHAPTER XVI.

MASTER PHILLIPS TAKES A JOURNEY.

WHEN the two were seated, the worthy and worshipful Master Phillips explained to Gerrard the nature of the journey they were to take together.

‘We make for Chartley Manor,’ said he by a circuitous route. ‘I have business with Sir Amias, and it will serve to introduce thee to the household.’

‘But my duty,’ asked the other. ‘I confess I like not this prying into other men’s business.’

‘Thy duty is simple, and the eye service which is demanded of thee is not to last long. The birds are all in the net, my worthy sir, and want but thee to see that they escape not.’

‘*That* seems no easy task, friend Phillips. The birds as thou termeth them have many nests, methinks.’

‘Whither one go, the other will follow,’ returned Phillips. ‘Thou shalt take up thy quarters at Burton, and watch the Jesuit Gifford.’

‘Watch him, in what?’

‘In his goings and comings, mark his companions and follow him as closely as may be. Become his shadow, so that whenever or wherever we may chance to light on him, we find thee within call. In a week at most thy task will be over.’

‘Well, said Gerrard, ‘I am ready, since it is so required of me, but I confess I do not comprehend this delay. If we have these traitors, why not strike and seize them?’

‘You will understand why, ’ere long,’ said Phillips, coolly. ‘In the meantime your duty is plain. We start at daylight.’

The pair arrived at Burton without adventure. Phillips seemed to know by instinct every bridle path and lane, and they

never once debouched upon the highway in their two days' journey.

The first man they met in the village of Burton was Gilbert Gifford. He saluted Gerrard with consummate coolness, and stared at Master Phillips with the unconcerned eye of one who meets a stranger for the first time.

'I must offer thee my regrets for the detention of thy companion,' he said to Gerrard. 'Sir Anthony Babington having discovered that he was acting in misapprehension has discharged himself of his company.'

'And where, pray, is Sir Anthony?'

'At Chartley Manor the guest of Sir Amias Paulet. I have already informed you of his business in the north. I trust that you, having seen no cause to doubt me, have given me none to doubt you.'

This astounding coolness on the part of the priest struck Gerrard with admiration, not unmixed with pity.

He felt a pang of sorrow at the thought that he was the instrument to work the destruction of so bold a man.

‘I trust, sir, that your comrade will successfully accomplish his errand and betake himself to his private business,’ said he.

Gilbert Gifford bowed and turned.

‘An extraordinary man,’ said Gerrard as they rode on.

‘Very!’ said Phillips drily.

‘I wonder if that which he told me concerning Babington is true.’

‘As regards his love for the Queen—yes. As regards his present departure—no. ’Tis a pretty plot, but we have the clue. However, yonder is Chartley Manor. You shall ride back with Babington, for the Jesuit will not move until he sees him.’

‘Methinks ’twas strange that he was open before thee. Hast he ever seen thee?’

‘More than likely. I am a man whose name is too well known not to give those who have cause to dread me endeavour to make acquaintance with my person. Dost thou not comprehend that ’tis this very intelligence of his which makes him repeat his tale in my hearing. He is a wily fellow.’

Gerrard was silent. He felt bewildered by these niceties of stratagem.

In a few minutes more they had reached Chartley, and were admitted to the presence of the Governor. Sir Amias Paulet was a stern black-browed man, who had already gained for himself the reputation of a Puritan, at a time when that name had not yet acquired the significance which afterwards attached to it. He received his nephew with rough cordiality, and Master Phillips with a reverence not un-mixed with a certain dislike.

The two were speedily closeted together, and Gerrard was left to cool his heels in the ante-room. He had not been there many minutes when a side door opened and there entered no less a person than Captain Nicholas Hum.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VALUE OF DRINKING BEER.

‘Now by the horns of Beelzebub, but I am rejoiced to see thee, boy,’ he cried. ‘What, ho, there, Jenkins, two cups of Malaga. Wilt break thy fast upon a pasty, or a slice of brawn? No, well then, we’ll drink.’

‘Thou seemst to have fallen upon good days, Hum.’

‘Noble days, by the head of Holofernes, I am lapped in abundance. That Babington has a heart of gold.’

‘Art friends with him, then?’

‘Marry, that am I, since I have betrayed thee and thy vile tricks, Gerrard.’

‘What sayest thou knave?’ cried Gerrard with his hand on his sword.

‘Not so fast, little David, not so fast,’ laughed the other with great composure. ‘I but ingratiated myself with the gentleman, by telling him some few thousand lies concerning thy employment, and he has graciously rewarded me with meat and drink in the hope of hearing more of ye.’

‘I thought that we were to meet at the brewer’s of Burton,’ said Gerrard.

‘So we will, anon. I am quartered here. A fine house, and a handsome wench, a crop eared dolt of a husband, and cellars full of beer, what can the heart of a man desire more! Faith, I am reminded of my adventure of twelve years back, when at the visit of the Queen to Lord North we drank twenty-four hogsheads of ale to the restoration of the Protestant religion.’

‘This drinking fashion of thine will be thy undoing, Hum.’

‘Not so, ’tis the fashion of my nation, we drink all things, what says the ballad—

‘ “The Russ drinks quass, Dutch Labeck beer,
And all that’s strong and mighty,
The Welshman, he metheglin quaffs,
The Irish Aqua Vitæ,

The French affects the Orleans grape,
The Spaniard tastes his sherry,
The English none of these can scape,
But he with all makes merry."

'Here I am as safe and sound as a winter-apple. And Sir Anthony Babington is making love to Queen Mary. That woman is a great grief, Gerrard, and has swallowed many a valiant armament, heigho!'

'Sigh not, but tell me of thy fortune, I am set on the track of Gifford.'

'He must have a sharp dagger who hunts the boar afoot,' said Hum. 'But that is thy business. You arrive at your end by fighting, I discover mine by drinking.'

'What mean you, Nicholas! the brewer of Burton supplies this house with beer.'

'Well!'

Hum paused, shut the door, tossed off the small remainder which his first draught had left in his tankard, laid his finger to his nose, and whispered—'He supplies other matter besides liquor. Miltiades, other matter.'

'Your meaning.'

'Ay, open thine ears and be instructed.

Lying in this house two nights ago, I was possessed by my familiar devil. A raging thirst beset me, and stealing to the cellar I strapped a cask—'

'What boots this record of thy intoxication?'

'Marry, much, having in the space of some forty-eight hours applied myself at such odd moments as fortune allowed me to the consumption of brown October, I discovered that mine host was a rascal and a cheat. His cursed barrel was but half full.'

'And what occupied the space?'

A box secured against the side of the cask, and wherein deposited I found a packet.'

'Dost thou say so.'

'Ay and will depose to it upon oath, little one. Well, I copy me the contents of the packet, 'twas all A's and B's and words of no significance save to those who held the key of it. I then pop me back my packet, fill up my barrel from its nearest comrade and set me to watch results.'

'Excellent, and what befel?'

'On the morrow my cask is swung into a

cart and landed at Chartley. I mount my horse and visit my patron. Being casually in the kitchen, chattering with Mistress Margery upon the value of colenot as a medicament for freckles and partaking of some strong waters to banish a sour griping which had some hours offended me, I see my cask brought in. "Let us tap that goodly barrel, Margery," quoth I. "Hands off, sirrah," cried a serving-man, "that is for Her Majesty's own cellar." "Majesty me no Majesty's, thou herring-gutted, flat-capped son of a cheese-mongering knave!" quoth I. "There is but one Majesty in these realms—the Majesty of England," and so made me as though I would up his paunch. The which I doubtless would have done to the great enhancing of my reputation and the glory of Protestantism, had not sweet Margery discharged upon him a ladleful of boiling kitchen stuff and soothed my incensed soul with a cunningly compounded cup of ginger galingale and gascoin wine. My end was served though, for I had traced the friendly cask to its resting-place.'

'And copied the packet,' cried Gerrard,

who had waited with considerable impatience for the conclusion of the relation of this exploit.

‘The copy is here! safe in my doublet,’ said Hum, and as he spoke the door opened and Sir Amias followed by Phillips entered. Sir Amias frowned at sight of Hum.

‘Art not yet afoot, Captain Hum!’ said he. ‘Thy Master Sir Anthony Babington goes hence within the hour.’

‘Your pardon, sir, but this is my master, or rather my comrade and valiant brother in arms,’ returned Hum coolly pointing to Gerrard.

‘I will explain an you permit me,’ said Gerrard, and he rapidly recounted his own and Hum’s adventure, placing the packet in Sir Amias’s hand as he spoke.

To his surprise Sir Amias who had been listening with gathering anger to the narration snatched the packet from his hands—

‘Meddling fool,’ cried he, ‘thy—’

‘Hush! hush’ cried Phillips, who nevertheless seemed also disquieted. ‘The gentleman has done good service. Captain Hum, you have hit upon a valuable discovery.’

Nevertheless do not repeat that which thou hast seen to others, or maybe thou wilt do thyself an injury. We *knew* of this paper.'

'God a mercy,' cried Gerrard, 'you seem to know everything.'

'A word with you, Sir Amias,' said Phillips and they withdrew.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIR ANTHONY BABINGTON'S SECRET.

As Hum had said Anthony Babington was making love to Queen Mary. Not such love as had been made to her, perhaps, but still such love as he dared to make for all that. According to Walshingham's directions the rigour of the durance of the imprisoned Queen had been lessened. Mary had her own servants, secretaries and maids. Sir Anthony Babington admitted to her presence, found her seated on a low chair, with her back to the light, and her white hands models of delicacy and beauty, caressing listlessly the silky ears of a spaniel which lay on her lap.

Mary was at this epoch long past her

prime. She was growing stout and could not walk much. The scrofulous taint of her constitution showed itself in her complexion which had become discoloured. Yet with fine eyes, cosmetics, false hair and padded stays she remained fascinating to all the world and beautiful to all but her tire-women.

As Babington entered she rose with eagerness and the little spaniel springing from her arms stood furiously barking at her feet. Babington flung himself on his knee.

‘Mouston has forgotten thee, dear friend,’ said Mary in a voice which completed the charm of her eyes. ‘But *I* do not forget.’

And she raised him with a hand whose fingers seemed to tingle a response to his passionate kiss.

‘Saints never forget,’ said the young man, ‘and thou art mine.’

‘The same fond boy as ever,’ said Mary, sinking back into a posture of studied ease. ‘What medicine will cure thee of thy rashness?’

‘What medicine ever cures those suffering from wounds like mine?’

‘Many, dear Babington, absence, misfortune or success.’

‘I have tried the former twain,’ said Babington. ‘The last is yet to be tried, and, my Sovereign, we have to try it now.’

Mary’s manner altered like a flash. Her bosom heaved, her eyes glowed, and the smoothed-out furrows of her brow appeared again. She struck her hand upon the arm of the chair with fierceness—

‘What say you !’

Babington felt his heart leap as though the blow had been struck on his breast. He lowered his burning eyes and rose to his feet. The pair were no longer mistress and lover, but Queen and subject.

‘We are ready !’

‘At last then !’

‘Ballard has arrived from France and has brought the promised letter from Mendoza. Six of my friends have sworn upon the gospel to accomplish your release. I have opened a way of communication to this house. Say but your will, my Queen, and you are free.’

Mary, with both hands on her bosom,

panted like a runner who had won a race.
'The letter! the letter! the letter!'

'Here,' and he drew from his breast the letter which had cost so many journeys.

Mary pointed to the door with one hand, and held the letter to the light with the other. Anthony Babington drew his sword and moved to the curtains of the doorway.

Presently Mary turned round, and thrust the letter into her bosom.

'My heart,' she cried, and holding out her arms, tottered.

Babington sprang forward, his sword still in his right hand, and caught the falling woman in his left arm. She lay panting on his breast, and clinging to him.

The young man's love was pure and passionate. The injured, betrayed, and imprisoned Queen was to him a divinity. She represented to him that which the statue Galatea had represented to Pygmalion—his Ideal. Through all their love passages he had never been so near to her as now, and he trembled so that he could scarcely support her.

Mary loved Babington also, but her love

was that of a woman who has loved many times, and she recovered herself without difficulty.

‘Sheath your sword, dear friend,’ said she with a smile. ‘There is no danger now.’

‘You faint, you grow pale.’

‘Nothing, ’twill pass, no, no, I need no help. Sit thee there, there on that stool yonder; now thy plans.’

Babington as calmly as his blood allowed him, recounted the substance of his hopes. Mary beat her foot upon the floor.

‘’Tis well conceived,’ said she musing. ‘But I am ill-guarded. Fifty gallant gentlemen could easily surround me at a stag-hunt. Some pretence for a riding party to Texley or Stafford woods. Yes, it would serve, but then, what then. We can count I think, upon Lancashire and York. The North will rise for me. But the South? Kent, Surrey, the City. What of Elizabeth? Her *name* is an army.’

Babington said slowly—‘If your Majesty shall order it, she shall not long trouble you.’

Mary started with indignation. ‘What, murder, no!’

‘She is an usurper.’

‘Depose her then.’

‘She is a heretic.’

‘I do not deal with religions.’

‘She is a bastard.’

‘Silence, sir.’

‘Her removal has been sanctioned by the Church.’ Mary turned. ‘She has betrayed you.’ Mary crossed to the window. ‘She has imprisoned you. She has set your son against you.’

‘Oh, if I was but assured of it,’ said the Queen of Scots, and her eyes filled with tears.

Babington ran to her—covered her hands with kisses. ‘By your sufferings and my love, give me but one word.’

Mary allowed herself to be drawn into his embrace. Her eyes met his, her breast heaved against his own, his very lips felt the movement of hers as she murmured, ‘I am then loved once more.’ She held his face back. Her eyes waxing wide and splendid poured all the passion which burnt her into his soul, and then closed slowly. She shuddered in his arms, and locking

her white wrists round his neck, she turned her mouth to his and kissed him full and close.

Babington felt a cloud of fire pass over his senses. Had he not torn himself away he would have fainted.

Mary, transfigured and radiant looked at him for an instant, and then the colour faded out of her cheeks and a cold hand clutched her heart. She seemed to see at her feet two corpses. The stabbed body of Rizzio, and the headless trunk of Chastelard.

‘Leave me, leave me,’ she cried. ‘I have kissed but two men, and they are dead.’

Babington mounted his horse as in a dream and galloped madly along the road to Burton. He felt that he was answered.

Had he then met Elizabeth surrounded by an army he would have killed her.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONFERENCE.

‘THE booby nearly stumbled upon the whole mystery,’ said Phillips.

‘Is he to be trusted?’ asked Paulet.
‘There may be no harm done yet, and he suspects nothing of *our* designs.’

‘He can be trusted,’ said Phillips. ‘We have good information of him, and the other is true as steel. What do you advise?’

‘To hurry the conspiracy; all is ripe now. Mary is ready to write to Babington the permission he requires.’

‘The permission—’

‘The permission not to oppose the last measure of Ballard.’

‘You frighten me, Phillips; and that—’

‘Is to kill the Queen, and carry off herself. Babington is wild for love of her, and has already promised to lie ready with a troop of horse—and on some given occasion—when she takes advantage of the permission to ride, which we have so graciously accorded her—is to swoop down, scatter the guard, and rouse the North.’

‘But the Queen! The Queen!’

‘The method and manner of the crime is not yet determined, I am waiting for something definite.’

‘Master Phillips, your employer is a very bold man.’

‘Sir Francis Walshingham will do nothing which is not *effectual*,’ said Phillips with a hideous smile.

Sir Amias Paulet sprang up and paced the chamber.

‘I wish I had not meddled in the business,’ said he. ‘’Tis an ugly thing to betray some of the best blood in England to the scaffold.’

‘It is necessary,’ said Phillips simply. ‘You have your orders, I mine, let us obey

them, for we may be sure that they have had the highest sanction.'

'If I thought that the Queen—' said Amias.

'The Queen, what does she order? What does she wish? Who can read the inscrutable woman who demands to be obeyed by instinct? There is but one man in England who has possessed himself of the mind of Elizabeth, and that man is Walsingham. That which he orders *she* will have already considered to its fullest consequence.'

'Be it so. What would you have me do?'

'Nothing. Be blind, deaf, let the fool Babington pour his love vows into Mary's ear. Let Nan and Curle pass whole days undisturbed at their desks, search nothing, let her say what she pleases—I shall hear it, let her write what she pleases—I shall read it. Remain undisturbed and watching until that night when she says to you "I would like to ride to-morrow to Fiscall Park" Then—'

'Well then.'

‘Then attend her yourself with so small a train as her dignity permits, and wait events.’

‘And you?’

‘Your nephew, ignorant of all our secret plans, watches Gifford. Hum shall accompany him. ’Tis well to have a blade at hand upon whom one can rely. *I* will take such means as shall bring this folly to an end.’

‘And then?’

‘And then—and then. Well *then* what happens will be history.’

And closing the door, Master Phillips stepped out into the ante-room.

CHAPTER XX.

MASTER GERRARD FINDS HIMSELF FOLLOWING SHADOWS.

HAVING received their instructions, the two friends held a council of war.

‘It is evident to me,’ said Gerrard, ‘that there is more in this business than we guessed. I believe that Walshingham is in possession of all particulars.’

‘I have believed that all along, dear boy,’ quoth Hum, ‘but na’theless it matters but little. Let us earn our pay, live our lives, and bless heaven that we are not overburdened with more brains than the thickness of our heads would warrant.’

‘Then you advise—’

‘Do you watch Gifford as you are bid,

while I will lodge me at my brewer's. 'Twill not do for us to be seen much together.'

'Twill be lonely for thee, Hum,' said Gerrard with a smile.

'Man is never lonely when in the company of wine and women,' quoth Hum, twirling his moustache, 'and faith I take my love and liquor as they come, without any violent abuse of fortune.'

"The Italian in her high chopine
Scotch lass and lovely Frou, too;
The Spanish donna, French madam
I do not fear to go to.
Nothing too full of hazard dread
Nought lives about the centre,
No fashion, frolic none or wench
On which I dare not venture."

'I can pass my time in a country house as well as any other, believe me. Now for the best way to watch your Jesuit.'

'His business is evident.'

'Of course he is the first of the chain of posts which communicate with London.'

'True, then comes Savage at Banbury, Gage at Stony Stratford, Ballard at Leigh-

ton Buzzard, Abington at St Albans, and Salisbury at Highgate.'

'Go on!'

'And — and — Tichbourne, at Lincolns Inn fields.'

'Well!'

'That is all!'

'Not so, good youth. What of the little lady who stabbed me in the arm.'

Gerrard bit his lips. 'I think that she is at Lincolns Inn Fields likewise, but what of her?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing, nay, blush not Ganymede. 'Tis in sooth a pretty wench.

"Oh, for the days when I was young,
And never had learnt to roam."

'But there, you are out of countenance. Let us return to Gifford.'

'Your advice!'

'I think that we had better survey our position from two points.'

'What mean you?'

'There are two roads to every town, dear lad, the road in and the road out. Now if

our Jesuit goes one way, he goes in, and if he goes the other, he gets out.'

'Mercy, Hum, have done with these follies.'

'Tis no folly, but fact, my little signior. Now, suppose I watch one road and you the other. So soon as my brewer gets back his barrel from Chartley, if our surmise be correct, he will receive a visit from Master Gifford, who will get the packet and post with it to Banbury. Now, your duty is to follow him thither, see the packet safe delivered, and return again.'

'There seems little use in that,' said Gerrard.

'Bah! How do you know that there is not another man watching Savage at Banbury, and half a dozen watching us both for that matter. You do not know what catching conspirators means, sweet boy, though thou art a tall lad of thy hands, and drinkest for a beginner fairly enough!'

'Tis like to be wearisome work.'

'I have a shrewd notion, Gerrard mio, that 'twill not last very long.'

'How so!'

‘Because you and I have not been set to work yet. What the plague! Are gentlemen armed and mounted to be kept dancing at the heels of a little Jesuit priest for nothing? No, by this light! They have got us ready, and some day we have just to stretch out our fingers and close our hands!’

‘Away then, I will send for thee when I want thee.’

‘And I will communicate with thee should my Jesuit have recourse to fresh beguilements. Farewell—

“We’ll plunder, burn, and sink, my lads,
We’ll bring ’em in by scores,
And every lass we love, my lads,
Shall roll on Moidores!”

‘Adios mio caro Gerrardo!’

Father Gifford had taken up his quarters in a private house two miles on the Chartley side of Burton, and Gerrard set himself to watch this house as a cat watches a mouse.

The second day he saw Gifford come out and ride into Burton. He stopped

at the brew house for three hours and then returned. Gerrard saddled his horse and stole down the road to Banbury. He waited in a thicket until dark, and then beheld the priest riding along the road on an ambling pony. At three in the morning he watched him into the inn gates and saw Savage ride off at a gallop. Gifford remained for two hours, and Gerrard, who guessed that he was breakfasting, swore manfully. At seven o'clock he returned calmly, and Gerrard followed unsuspected.

For two days all was quiet, and then Savage came riding through into Burton in guise of a traveller in haste, and called at the house where Gifford lay.

The morrow, midday, Hum made his appearance at Gerrard's inn with the intelligence: 'They send another barrel of beer off this evening.'

For nearly three weeks did this following of night shadows last. Gerrard was getting a sort of nightbird, and went to sleep all day. Hum who averred himself on the best of terms with the brewer's wife had

achieved a belly like a bombard, and his nose seemed carbuncled with the wealth of the Indies.

‘I shall die of the megrims, if this continues much longer,’ sighed Gerrard at one of their meetings.

‘And I of a malt liquor dropsy,’ said Hum. ‘Beshrew me, but a woman who is not approached under the ninth quart is death to an honest man, however willing he may be. By David’s sow, an you prick me, I should bleed beer.’

On the evening of the 13th of August a change took place.

Gifford exchanged his pony for a strong hackney and having met Savage at Banbury, galloped on with him to Stony Stratford. Gerrard followed on and succeeded in reaching Stinge’s house unsuspected. Tying his horse under the wall, he reconnoitred the stables. There were four horses there besides those which brought Gifford and Savage.

‘This is a council of war,’ said Gerrard to himself, ‘I wonder if my fortune will again assist me,’ but in vain did he try to obtain

some coign of vantage upon which to perch himself.

The house was a sort of prison, as we have said, and presented an unbroken front of stone. After three hours' waiting Gerrard saw from a distance four horsemen take the road to Leighton Buzzard. Despite their cloaks, he recognised Tichbourne, Babington, Ballard and Savage. Gifford and the rider of the fourth horse remained within. It was evident that no important conference had taken place. At last the door opened and Gifford and another came out.

Gerrard could scarce restrain a cry when he recognised the slim figure of the disguised girl.

CHAPTER XXI.

QUEEN MARY'S PLANS.

MARY of Scotland had been restored to new hope.

A prisoner for many years, she saw at last a chance of freedom and of vengeance, and her faithful Morgan had advised her of the presence of Ballard, and Babington had apprised her of the resolves of the conspirators.

Never before had she been so free to plot and to write. Sir Amias left her entirely to her own devices, and thanks to Gifford's friend the brewer, her correspondence passed freely, and was, as she thought, unsuspected out of the Manor House.

For long days together she worked at her

web. Though she employed two secretaries, men absolutely true to her, and upon whose honesty subsequent events cast no suspicion, she never suffered them to write any paper but in her own cabinet, and in her presence.

She sat at a table with the two men opposite to her. To Nan she dictated in French the substance of that which she desired to say. Nan took down her words, and she corrected the draft. If the letter was to remain in French, it was ciphered and sealed by herself. If it was to be in English it was translated by Curle, read to her again and ciphered. No dispatch was ever sent out, which had not been composed, read twice or thrice, and then ciphered by her own hand. She had written in this way to Charles Paget, to Lord Paget at Madrid, to Mendoza and to Morgan. To Lord Paget she urged how needful it was for Philip to bestir himself, for that at last a plot was afoot which could not but be successful. To Mendoza, acquainted as he was with every detail of the conspiracy, she contented herself by intima-

ting a cordial approval. To Morgan and the Archbishop of Glasgow she poured out her hopes that the hour of her deliverance was at hand.

To Babington she wrote in strains of imperative command. She advised that the Catholics should be everywhere privately armed, that the young men who were in the plot should be encouraged and kept in heart. She applauded his zeal in the cause of the Church. She desired him to calculate carefully what towns he could take, and on what succours he could count. She told him to have a party in readiness to carry her off. She suggested the stoppage of the posts and common couriers. She hinted plainly at favours deep and many in store for those who befriended her.

Babington on his side wrote to her as 'his most dear sove ign,' and vowed that he was ready at the hazard of his life to do her service. His friends had taken a solemn vow to prevail in the Church's behalf, or to die in so honourable an attempt.

These letters were read by Phillips to Walshingham.

‘Are your spies planted?’ the Minister would ask from time to time.

‘As you desired.’

‘Have you drawn out warrants for the arrest of these men named?’

‘I have!’

‘And men ready to execute the arrests?’

‘Yes.’

‘Very good then,’ said Walshingham. ‘Wait.’

At last Phillips gave him a letter with something of an air of triumph.

It was the letter from Babington to Mary, and ran as follows:—

‘For the despatch of the usurper, from the obedience from whom they are by the excommunication of His Holiness made free—thou and six noble gentlemen—my private friends—who for the zeal they bear to the cause of Her Majesty’s service, are ready to undertake the tragical execution.’

Walshingham said when he read this, ‘I will go to the Queen.’

CHAPTER XXII.

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S PLANS.

THE Queen heard her Minister's story with patience and calmness. 'And who are these gentlemen?' she asked.

Walshingham told her. 'They are Catholics of my own Court, men whom I have trusted and honoured. Abington, Telney, Tichbourne. By my father's soul but this is too base.'

Walshingham bowed.

'How long has the matter been afoot?'

'I have known it for more than a year.'

Elizabeth rose from her chair and began to pace the room. The lioness when lashing herself to rage takes to pacing her den.

'And we have suffered this peril all unknowing.'

‘Your Majesty has suffered no peril, even had my poor guards been insufficient. Had not these men been hourly watched, there is one thing which would keep them from the commission of the deed they meditate—’

‘And that—’

‘The consent of the Queen of Scots,’ said Walshingham in a low voice.

Elizabeth turned pale.

‘Again that suggestion! Silence! She will not consent.’

‘May I presume to speak?’ said the Minister.

‘No!’ said Elizabeth.

‘Then I will retire and leave your Majesty to remember.’

‘To remember! To remember *what*, sirrah? By God’s bones but thou talkest riddles. Speak out, man!’

‘I would ask your Majesty what has happened since your sister was crowned Queen of Scotland. First, she refuses to ratify the treaty of Leith—disloyalty. Then she intrigues with the Catholics in England and the Spanish ambassadors in London—treachery. Then she—she is

separated by a strange accident from her husband.'

'Silence, varlet,' cries the Queen, 'I will hear no such language.'

'Your Majesty did me the honour to tell me that when we were alone in this cabinet I might speak out freely for your sole ear.'

Elizabeth made a motion of impatient assent.

'I pass over the death of Lord Darnley, and the—ahem—marriage of Lord Bothwell. Your Majesty gives your sister an asylum in England. Twice she raises revolt, now she meditates assassination.' There was a dead silence in the chamber. The Queen breathed hard.

'Walshingham,' she said at last, 'you have served me well. I owe you thanks. Nay, do not kneel, but I cannot believe this. Have you seen the Queen of Scots of late?'

'Not since her removal to Chartley, where your Majesty directed me to send her. She is in good health, and enjoys the country air. Her guardian sends me word that she has not looked so—so *young* for years.'

Elizabeth started, and casting an involuntary glance at a mirror, bit her thin lips with teeth which were already black.

‘If I could believe it,’ she said at last. Walshingham saw that his moment was come. ‘May I bring your Highness the last proof?’

The Queen sat down, got up, looked at the mirror, at Walshingham, at the letter, and then—walked out of the room. Walshingham smiled.

It was just at this moment that Gilbert Gifford, standing at the head of the table in Stinge’s house, unbuttoned his doublet, and gave Babington the packet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE QUEEN'S PACKET.

THE young man took it with trembling fingers, and reverently kissed it.

Then Tichbourne, taking a pen, sat down and commenced to decipher. As he wrote, Babington, looking over his shoulder, could not forbear expressions of delight, and at last uttered a loud cry of joy.

‘She has consented.’

‘Let us hear, if you please,’ said Ballard, who alone remained calm and saturnine.

Chidiock Tichbourne then read out the letter, which became, as Phillips predicted, ‘a matter of history.’

‘I am ready. The six must be set at work, and you will provide that, on their design being accomplished, I

may be rescued from this place, and be in safe keeping when your friends arrive. It will be hard to fix a day for the execution, you must therefore have a party in readiness to carry me off. Give the gentlemen all the assurances which they can require on my part. You will consult and examine together if possible—if they cannot execute their particular purpose, to proceed with the rest of the enterprise. If the difficulty be only with myself, if you cannot manage my rescue, because I am in the Tower or some place too strong for you, do not hesitate on that account.'

'Noble heart,' said Babington.

'Go on, for the honour of God. I would gladly die at any time, did I know that the Catholics were out of bondage.'

Ballard muttered a prayer.

'I will do what I can to raise Ireland and Scotland. Beware of traitors. There are priests even in the service of the enemy.'

Gifford smiled.

'Keep no compromising papers about you, and reveal as little of our intentions as possible to the French Ambassador. He is a good man, but his master is too closely allied with this man and may cross our purpose.

'There are three ways in which my escape may be managed. I ride sometimes in the open ground between this and Stratford. It is usually in entire solitude, and my guardian who attends me takes out eighteen or

twenty horse with him, only armed with pistols, we could arrange a day, and fifty or sixty mounted men could carry me off with ease.'

'Marry, I like her spirit,' said Savage striking the table.

'And now, gentlemen,' said Babington, 'to work! Our presence here is useless, worse than useless—dangerous. To London, and warning our friends, bring them in by different roads to my house in Southampton Buildings. There we will finally arrange our plans and fix upon the doer of the deed which is to make England free. Come! to horse.'

'I must myself return for to-night at all events,' said Gilbert Gifford, quietly. 'A sudden departure from my lodgings would breed suspicion and lose me a home.'

'It is a fortunate accident, good father,' said Tichbourne, resting his hand on the shoulder of his page. 'This little conspirator here, whom accident has drawn into our device, must return to Chartley. Her presence will reassure the Queen, and 'tis not right for her to be galloping the roads. You will see her safely.'

‘I am honoured by the charge,’ said Gifford, and if across his face there swept a frown of annoyance, it was unnoticed.

In a few minutes the conspirators were in full flight, while Gifford and his charge were on their road to Chartley.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SWORD PLAY.

GERRARD from his ambush watched the two to a safe distance and followed.

‘I’ll speak to her,’ said he to himself, ‘and learn her name, if the Jesuit but leave her for an instant.’

But there seemed no probability of such an occurrence. The pair jogged leisurely forward, and our adventurer at every hill he stopped he saw them still quietly riding on, as though engaged in conversation.

He had begun to despair, when, to his delight, he saw Gifford take the bridle road that led to the inn, where he had slept on the night when the affair of the letter had taken place.

‘They will breakfast here,’ quoth he, and tightened his belt. ‘I wish to heaven they would ask *me*.’

But such a notion was absurd.

‘At any rate,’ thought Gerrard, ‘I may get a chance to see her alone.’

And with this intent he drew his horse into a thicket and eyed the house as a terrier eyes a rat hole.

When a man is doubly oppressed by love and by hunger, he is seldom in pious mood, and during the space of an hour the poor fellow heaved sighs enough to freight a Spanish galleon and vented curses enough to sink her.

At last the two came out and remounted their horses. Gerrard observed with dismay that Gifford lagged behind, and cast round him many curious glances.

It was evident that he had either fear or suspicion of being followed. ‘An he return and find me,’ vowed Gerrard, ‘I’ll spit him despite all the Walshinghams in England.’

There is a French proverb which says that a fasting man is a dangerous enemy,

and the condition of Master Phillips' envoy proved the truth of it.

He had tasted nothing for more than twelve hours, and could have disputed the possession of a baron of beef with a hungry lion.

Gifford, however, after a careful survey, struck spurs to his horse, and rejoined his companion.

'They mean galloping now,' said Gerrard behind his teeth, 'and their nags have had two feeds since morning. May I perish if I ever embark again in such enterprise. Hum has a mouth of gold and speech of silver.'

The rapidity with which Gifford now pushed on, however, compelled his follower to force his horse into something like a canter. At last he came to a hill just before Cogshall that made him relax his pace.

When he reached the top of the hill, he uttered a loud cry of dismay. The road stretched winding along the valley for many a mile before him, but the travellers had vanished. Gerrard cast a rapid glance round. There was visible nothing moving

but the sails of a windmill. Suddenly from under the shadow of this windmill a single horseman stole. Gerrard stood in his stirrups and shaded his eyes with his hands. It was Gifford.

‘What means this,’ thought he.

The horseman turned his course, and came rapidly to where he stood.

Gerrard’s heart beat. He alighted, tightened his girths, loosened his pistols, remounted, drew his sword, brought his dagger hilt to the point, and waited.

Gilbert Gifford galloped furiously up the hill, and as he topped it Gerrard started out. The instant the Jesuit saw him, he uttered a cry, and reined his horse as though to turn.

‘Stand!’ cried Gerrard. Gifford drew a pistol and fired.

The bullet was so well aimed that it struck the pommel of Gerrard’s sword, and nearly carried the weapon from his grasp.

‘Cur,’ shouted he and charged him.

‘Spy,’ returned Gifford, plunging the empty pistol at his adversary, and making his horse bound forward.

The two men met, and Gerrard having the advantage of ground drove the other into the hedge.

Passing his reins round his arm, and drawing his dagger. 'Yield!' he cried, 'yield, or I'll slay thee.'

Gifford's reply was a sword thrust, *en carte* which grazed Gerrard's ribs.

Gerrard parried with his poignard, and returned with a rapid passage in tierce a fair point at the priest's breast. His rapier shivered like glass. 'Coward! thou hast mail under thy doublet.'

'And good need when assassins are ahead,' said Gifford, as calmly as though in his cloister. 'Let us try that for fair dealings,' and he ran our adventurer through the left shoulder. Gerrard dealt him a tremendous blow on the head with his broken hilt, and then flung it away, changed his dagger to his right hand, and made an attempt to stab his adversary in the throat.

Gifford who was evidently a practised horseman, wheeled his hackney as though the beast had been bred to the *manege*, and shortening his sword wounded Gerrard in

the thigh. The blow was so far decisive that the young man felt that disabled in bridle hand and right leg, all command of his horse was gone.

Collecting all his energies for a final effort, however, he let Gifford return to the parade, and then presenting his wounded side fairly to the thrust he suffered the other to drive home the blow to the hilt and reaching forward struck him with his poignard in the face. The next instant he fell senseless from his horse.

Gifford wiped the blood from his brow, and laughing his silent laugh, prepared to alight and give the *coup de grace* to his vanquished enemy, when his eye caught sight of something in the valley.

Far down at the turn of the road, were two figures. Both were horsemen, and having apparently met from different ways, they had paused to speak.

Presently one figure pointed to the hill and set out full speed for Chartley. The other flashed out a sword which caught the sun's rays in its drawing, and dashed onwards and upwards.

‘A rescue!’ said Gifford. ‘Oh Walshingham, if this is thy work thou shalt pay dearly for it.’

And bestowing no more thought on aught but his own safety, he headed at full gallop back along the road he had traversed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE KNOT OF RIBBON.

WHEN Gerrard recovered, he was lying in a whitewashed room upon a pallet bed. Somebody was humming 'Greensleeves' in a corner.

'Where am I?' he asked.

'Taking thine ease in thine inn,' said a jolly voice.

"Thy smock of silk, both fair and white,
With gold embroidered gorgeously,
Thy petticoat of sedal right
All these I bought thee graciously.
Oh! Greensleeves was my delight,
Greensleeves was all my joy,
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
Who but my Lady Greensleeves?"

'Marry, my brave captain, of thine own four bones, how dost thou?'

‘Hum, is’t thou? God be praised. How did I come here?’

‘To the tune of “Up tails all,”’ said Nicholas. ‘I found thee lying with a brace of sword thrusts in thy body, and an ugly wound in thy breast. But give heaven thanks, for thou wert never born to die in thy boots, that’s evident.’

‘And where is *he*?’

‘Thine adversary? That know not I, for I judged it better to patch up thy carcass than to make any chance of cracking his sconce. Nevertheless, Miltiades, an thou deem me wrong, name me his name and I will find and fight him though his living place be Apollyon’s belly.’

‘It was Gifford,’ said Gerrard. ‘But no matter. How foundest thou me?’

‘Dost know this?’ cried Hum, fumbling in his doublet, and dangling before Gerrard’s eyes the knot of ribbon which he had given to the unknown girl at Leighton Buzzard.

“Some do long for pretty knacks
And some for strange devices,
God send me what my lady lacks
I care not what the price is!”

‘Look at it, boy.’

‘By this light, ’tis hers! How camest thou by it?’

‘Thou must know,’ said Hum, ‘that—yet stay, to all narrations by valiant men and good Christians, is needed the balmy and soothing influence of sherries, flip ale, or some such soother, the which as has been proved by Galen, drieth up all ill-humours and openeth the soul. Therefore, sweet youth—’

‘Pestilence seize thee,’ groaned Gerrard. ‘Order thy cursed liquor an that be thy prate, and continue.’

‘Call no liquor cursed, Miltiades,’ said Hum with great composure. ‘Thou art young, and belike in thine age will, like the Prophet, bless those that thou now despisest. Ho, house there! Yare! Yare! Below! The largest pot of thy strongest ale, and hark ye, score it to the account of thy master, for methinks that mine has outgrown its welcome—I am living here, *Gerrardo, vi et armis*. The hostess is but a churlish soul, and makes pernicious demands for the sight of gold, the which

I scorn as becomes a soldier, a bon comrade,
and sinker of repute. What says the poet?

“Nothing is worse than too full purse,
For niggards and dull pinchers,
They always spare, yet live in care,
No soldier loves such flinchers.
The merry man with cup and can,
He lives as long as twenty,
The miser's wealth ne'er helps his health
Example we have plenty!”

‘But to my tale—’

‘Ay, and a murrain to thy tongue. Go on, man, for the love of peace.’

‘Well then, thou must learn that finding my brewer's wife wax somewhat musty, for I am a man, Gerrardo, that loves variety—I set out to visit thee. I waited, imbibed a quart or two, and waited still. Thou camest not, and I set forth to follow thee. Below the windmill yonder, I met me with our lady-love riding boy-fashion. She did me the honour to recognise me and cry to me. I came to her. She whips me out this knot of ribbon from her bosom, and scribbling a note upon her tablets, says, “Take this, fellow, an you be a man, to

your master with all speed. If he loves me, bid him haste.”’

‘Fool!’ cried Gerrard, ‘why hast thou delayed so long? The note—the note.’

‘Patience, Paris, patience. ’Tis here.’

Gerrard tried to read it, but the letters swam before his eyes.

‘Read it thou, in God’s name, quick.’

‘’Tis brief,’ said Hum coolly, ‘but its contents are momentous,’ and he read—

“‘I am betrayed. If thou dost truly profess friendship and hopest to win aught else of me, post to Chidiock Tichbourne, at Southampton House, and tell him. Fly! fly, fly!’”’

‘Hum, thou hast undone me,’ groaned Gerrard. ‘How long have I been here.’

‘Nine hours,’ said Hum, moving his nose in the tankard.

‘Nine hours, help me to rise! my doublet, ah, that cursed thrust.’ And he fell back again unable to stir.

‘The little Jesuit is a good blade,’ said Hum, coolly. ‘I can comprehend me the feint with which he nicked thee. So, so, lie still boy, ’tis useless to try to stir.’

‘Hum, for mercy’s sake, carry the letter for me.’

‘I! belly of the Pope! I, burn me if I do!’

‘Hum, I love her.’

‘The more fool thee, Miltiades, for may my nose plug a bung-hole in a sailor’s alehouse, if she love’s not Tichbourne,’ Gerrard groaned like a moving drawbridge.

‘Moreover, we are encamped against these traitors—sworn to defend the Majesty of England. Bound by all honour of blood and liquor to slay all Catholic traitors. Marry, the boy has played for a great stake. An he lose the game, let him pay his wages.’

‘Hark ye,’ said Gerrard in despair, ‘I will take the burden of this deed, if he be her lover the greater his fortune. If she love him, not the happier mine. I’ve given her my word to serve her, when she sent yon token, and shall I break it! No.’

And with astonishing resolution he got up and seized his doublet. Captain Nicholas Hum swore an oath so profound that it made the windows rattle.

‘Thou art a hero,’ he cried, ‘what am I that I should oppose thee! Give me the

missive and content thee. I will find the damned felon, and warn him to save his skin, if there be virtue in horseflesh and spurs.' Gerrard fell on his comrade's neck.

'Hush thee lad! Hush thee!' cried Hum. 'There! there! why all this coil? I will go, never fear. He has fainted! Oh Beelzebub, I have not felt such a plucking at my heart since my little sister Alison died. Tush! let me not forget that I am but a tavern bully. Hostess! Hostess! Thou gap-toothed beldam of perdition! A pot of ale, I say!' and placing the senseless Gerrard on the truckle bed, the valiant Hum dashed his knuckles into his eyes, and clanked downstairs.

'Look thee to the gallant gentleman until my return,' said he to the trembling ale wife. 'He is the nephew of the most noble and valiant Sir Amias Paulet, now at Chartley Manor, and who will burn this flae pack about thine ancient ears an harm happen to his kinsman. Dost mark me? So! another flagon and I am on the road.'

In good sooth in ten minutes he had saddled his horse, and was galloping off to

London. 'The world,' soliloquised he, 'is made up of fools. I am a fool to undertake the mission. Gerrardo is a fool to give it to me. Tichbourne is a fool to need that it should be given. Thank heaven that I have given over falling in love! What says the ballad?

"When Samson was a tall young man
His power and strength increased then,
And in the house and trick to Dan
The Lord did bless him everywhen.
But so it chanced upon a day
As he was walking on his way
He saw a damsel fresh and gay
In Timnath! In Timnath!"

'Ay, brethren, and a nice coil he fell into. I wager me that this galloping damsel is some lady light o' love come over from France in them pumps and half a petticoat. And yet, the folly is pleasant while it lasts, and adds experience to man. Better ride a jade than none at all. Ay! Ay!'

"Cast care away, let sorrow cease
A fig for melancholy,
Let's laugh and sing, or if we please
To frolic with sweet Dolly."

'Sweet Dolly! By the mass, but 'tis

these dollies that rule the earth! I'll think no more on't, but warn the springald and forget my philosophy over some burnt sack at Mother Wagtail's.

“ Oh, mistress mine, where are you roaming,
Stay and hear your true love's coming
That can sing both high and low.
Trip no further, pretty sweeting,
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth know.

‘Hold up, Oliver!’

And the musical vagabond dashed spurs into his horse, and resolved to reflect no more.

There was indeed more need of speed than argument, for as Hum rode down Highgate Hill on the second day of his journey, Master Phillips entered Walshingham's apartment.

‘At last,’ said Phillips, ‘she has opened all her heart.’

And he handed the Minister a copy of Mary's letter to Babington.

‘You are late,’ was the only remark of Walshingham. ‘Thou shouldst have been here this morning.’

‘The messenger was wounded,’ said Phillips coolly; and as he took the paper, the Minister observed that it was stained with blood.

‘This is ominous, Phillips,’ said he, pointing to the stain with a grim smile. He read the letter through, and then drew a parchment ready filled in from a secretaire. ‘We must begin operations, Phillips,’ said he, and taking a pen, signed his name with that neat slowness with which he did everything. ‘Let this be executed at once,’ said he; ‘we may get some particulars.’

Phillips took the document and looked.

It was a warrant for the arrest of John Ballard *alias* Captain Fortescue charged with being a disguised seminary priest.

‘We will take the others as we want them,’ said Walshingham coldly. ‘There is no need to hurry.’

‘None in the world,’ said Phillips.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HUM ON THE TRACK.

CAPTAIN HUM found it no easy task to discover the whereabouts of Chidiock Tichbourne. He called at Southampton House, but the porter grinned at him through a grating in the huge door, and protested that his master was not within.

‘I have business of extreme importance,’ said Hum.

‘It must wait,’ said the porter.

‘Dost want thine ears nailed to the door jamb?’ cried Hum.

‘By no means. Nor do I fear for them while thou art on that side,’ said the porter.

‘Thou art a sullen knave,’ roared Hum, driven to his wits’ end by this uncouth re-

ception. 'When I tell thy master I have brought news from the North he will have thee mounted on the wooden horse.'

'Not he,' quoth the porter complacently. 'Hadst thou come from the North thou wouldst have used other means to gain admission than bluster. Good even't ye,' and he banged the wicket. Spurring the heaving sides of his horse Hum rode across the square. 'I must find Babington,' he said. 'He trusts me and will readily admit me to Tichbourne.' But he tried inn after inn to no purpose. The folks either mistrusted him or purposely professed ignorance.

At last a bright thought struck him. He remembered that Gerrard had told him about the usurer. 'I will rouse Master Pinchfee,' said he, and slapped his empty pockets with great gusto.

Master Pinchfee lived near Holborn Bars, and though it was nigh dusk, his shop was not yet shut. Hum alighted, tied his horse to the horsepost, gave his red moustachois a prodigious curl and went in.

A very pretty young woman came to answer his knock.

‘A message for Master Pinchfee from the right noble Sir Anthony Babington, sweet maid,’ said Hum.

‘Maid me no maid, sir,’ said the girl casting down her eyes.

‘Madam, by the mass,’ then, said Hum. ‘Yet how so sweet a pullet could assume the matronage and condition of a hen passes my poor comprehension. I pray thee is thy master within doors?’

‘Master!’ cried the damsel bridling.

‘Father, then, sweet madam.’

‘Nor father either, sir.’

‘What,’ cried Hum, clapping his hand on his dagger. ‘*Husband*, Gods!—husband, that cankerous, decayed and usurous son of perdition, presumes to call himself husband, to so toothsome, white, plump, and pure a morsel of temptation. By the forty-nine nails in the buckler of Goliah of Gath, but I will slay the villian.’

‘Nay, for pity’s sake, sir.’

‘Nicholas, mistress, Nicholas Hum, soldier, lover, and hater of husbands. Captain Nicholas Hum.’

‘Well, Captain Nicholas, then, quit swaggering, my husband is from home.’

‘By Bacchus, is he! good! I am a confidant of Sir Anthony Babington, and have come with urgent messages. I have ridden fifty, ay, ninety miles since sunrise. So, sweet mistress—’

‘Margery—’

‘Margery, bring me thy spouse’s largest tankard full of the best wine.’

‘By this light, but thou art a saucy fellow thus to thrust thyself upon me,’ laughed Master Pinchfee’s newly made wife. ‘But, if thou bringest a message—’

‘That alters the case,’ said the captain composedly. ‘By heaven’s sunlight, but thou hast an ankle like the wrist of a gipsy,’ and he caught her round the waist.

‘Fie!’ cried Dame Pinchfee.

‘Nay, but one kiss to take away the taste of thy husband’s beard,’ said the captain.

‘Let me go,’ cried Dame Pinchfee, boxing his ears.

‘Never.’

‘Then thou shalt not have the wine. Oh, that is unmannerly.’

‘When women argue they are half convinced,’ said Hum, coolly wiping his mouth, ‘and having had the kiss, I am ready for the liquor. That’s right, laugh and be merry. Bless thy pretty heart, a soldier woos in other fashion than your fumbling usurers, who think a woman’s lips a purse not to be lightly opened. Fetch the tankard, Margaret, and thou shalt sit on my knee while I drink it.

“For he that will not when he may
He shall not when he would.”

‘Despatch, pretty one.’

‘Thou art a rude fellow,’ said she laughing, and ran off for the tankard.

‘Now, beshrew me,’ said Hum to himself, ‘but though I would fain save Tichbourne’s neck, I hope little Jabez will not return yet awhile.’

But he was disappointed. He had barely finished his second flagon, and had not yet persuaded his merry hostess to accept a seat on his proffered knee, when the querulous voice of the usurer was heard in the shop.

‘Margery! Margery!’

Margery rose in alarm.

‘My husband,’ said she.

‘Pooh! sit thee still,’ said Hum calmly.

‘Tis plain to see but thou art lately wedded.

I will answer for thee.’ And he roared at the full pitch of his voice: ‘*Come in.*’

‘Who is there, in heaven’s name!’ cried Pinchfee.

‘A valiant soldier, thou damned coin-chapping villain, and one that hath a message for thee.’

‘What means this, sir?’ cried the usurer.

‘Dost know that hand?’ asked Hum, holding out the paper which Babington had signed to Sir Amias Paulet—‘“*My servant and trusty companion, Captain Hum.*” Dost see it—dost read it—dost comprehend it! Madge, another beaker.’

‘Madge!’ said Master Pinchfee.

Ay, you hoary headed villain—Madge! What, bog’s bones! dost suspect me of light thoughts?’ and he drew his rapier. ‘Shall not a gentleman, a soldier, a friend of the most noble Sir Anthony Babington, call a pretty woman *Madge*, without some crop-

eared, money-breeding, gold-tinkering, bald pate of a husband must suspect him of lightness.'

'There, I prithee, put up thy weapon,' said Jabez; 'I meant nothing.'

'Tis well for thee,' said Hum, frowning like a dungeon. 'But, no matter! another stoup of canary, Maragetta mio.'

'Indeed, I think thou hast had enough, captain,' said Margaret simply. 'That is, if thou hast work on hand.'

'Thou art right,' said Hum, recovering himself; 'bless thy senses. Now, Master Pinchfee—quick. I have a message for Chidiock Tichbourne—where can I find him?'

'Thou shouldst surely know,' said the old man with a disturbed air.

'I was directed to Southampton House, but they will not admit me.'

'Did Sir Anthony Babington tell you nought?'

'Nought but to reach Tichbourne and give him the message.'

The little goldsmith contracted his grey brows.

‘I will take your message,’ said he at last.

‘It can be given by no one but myself.’

‘Why not?’

‘That is my secret.’

‘But if I do not choose to tell you where to go?’

‘Then I will go to Highgate and tell Master Bellamy that Master Pinchfee is too cautious.’

‘Hush, you are then one of us.’

‘In a manner.’

‘You know me,’ and the usurer made a sign.

‘It is my turn to be cautious,’ said Hum, who was not to be entrapped. ‘Why should I not return your suspicion? But, however, here am I to answer for myself. Lead me to Tichbourne.’

‘I know not rightly where to find him,’ said Pinchfee. ‘But come with me.’

‘My horse,’ queried Hum.

‘Shall be stalled here.’

‘By no means. I am an old soldier, and care not to have my beast save where I can put my hands on him. The inn yonder

will serve, and I will accept your hospitality to the extent of his fodder.'

'Nay,' began Pinchfee, who did not relish the method of proceeding. 'But—'

'I know thy generosity, good Jabez,' said Hum loftily. 'Thou wouldst fain bestow both me and my nag under thine own roof—'

'Not at all,' spluttered Jabez. 'I—'

'Thou wouldst rather pay for my faring at the inn. Well, so be it. A comrade is a comrade all the world over. So Mistress Margery another bottle of thy good spouse's wine to drink his health ere we start.'

'I do not drink,' stammered Jabez.

'Dost thou not. By the Mass,' said Hum. "'Tis an evil sign, and betokens a dry and freezing temperament—I would eschew—if only for thy buxom wife's sake—the pernicious habit of temperance. But never let sad thought fret thee. I will drink thy share.'

"'Tis sack makes the sport,
And who gains but that flavour
Though an abbess he court,
In her high shoes he'll save her.'"

'Tally—ally—ally ho.'

And Master Jabez, as much to his own disgust as to his roguish-wife's amusement, found himself coughing into a glass of his best sherry.

And now, bully-boy,' quoth Hum, 'I am thine. Banners advance! Sweet mistress I shall dream of thee.'

'This way,' quoth Jabez, 'this way.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POPE'S AUTHORITY.

THE conspirators had met at Southampton House.

The large hall of that building had been turned into an audience chamber, and Ballard explained to his friends the scheme he had in view.

Babington himself would undertake to rescue Mary. The rest must draw lots, and the drawer of the longest lot would undertake to kill Elizabeth.

'Tis easy,' said Savage grimly. 'She walks alone not infrequently. Abington and Telney could kill her at any moment.'

'Is her death absolutely needful?' asked Abington. 'I have received many favours at her hands.'

'It is absolutely needful,' said Ballard.

‘Elizabeth dead every Catholic gentleman in England will arm for her lawful successor.’

‘It is true that the assassin will be executed, but his execution will be a martyrdom.’

‘If I was sure of *that*,’ said Telney.

‘I will make you sure,’ said Ballard ‘if you listen.’ An ominous silence fell. The conspirators became conscious that a great secret was about to be revealed to them.

‘Five years ago,’ said the Jesuit, ‘I was in Rheims on Easter Day. The preacher at the seminary was a worthy friend of mine, an English consett. He spoke of Elizabeth and of the martyrdom of Campion and Parsons. “Pity it is,” said he, “that there can be found no one who has courage to bereave her of life.”’

The listening faces grew dark.

‘My companion, Anthony Tyrrell spoke to Father Allan the Principal. “Go on to Rome,” said the good man, “consult Alonzo Algazari, the rector of the English College there. I may not meddle in such matters.” Comforted by this advice, we pushed on to Rome. We saw the learned father and by

him were introduced to his Holiness himself.' Ballard paused for a moment with the air of a man cautious to recollect exactly, and presently continued—

“May it please your Holiness,” said Father Algazari, “here be these reverend priests lately from the hot harvest of England, who have come hither partly to gain strength to give the enemy a new encounter, but chiefly to obtain such spiritual graces from your beatitude as the nature of their country may require.” His Holiness smiled and our introducer continued—“One thing I am to move your Holiness in their behalf—for without the fulness of your apostolic authority they dare attempt nothing—that if any person moved with zeal should take out of this life their wicked Queen, whether your Holiness would approve of the action.”

A murmur arose and all bent eagerly forward.

‘Well, and the reply?’ asked Salisbury.

‘He turned to us and said, “Children beloved in the Lord we embrace you. We have always had a fatherly and pastoral care of you and your country. We have opened

the bowels of compassion upon you, and long bewailed your miseries. And touching the taking away of that impious Jezebel whose life God has permitted thus long for our scourge, I would be loath that you should attempt your own destruction—and we know not how our censure on that point among her subjects which profess themselves our children, would be taken. But if you can wisely give such council as may be without scandal to the party or to us, know you we do not only approve the act—” A cry burst from the conspirators, “But think the doer, if he suffer death simply for that, to be worthy of canonisation.”’

There was a pause, and Savage spoke out. ‘Let us cast lots at once,’ said he, ‘or if you care not for so tedious a process, I am ready.’

‘And I!’

‘And I!’

Ballard smiled approval. He honestly believed that he was assisting in a great and good work. At the moment when he had raised his hand to address his friends there came a loud knocking at the door.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WARNING.

THE officers deputed by Master Phillips to arrest Ballard, were named Trapdoor, and Openwork. They were accompanied by their trusty followers, Captain Baskethilt, and Sergeant Sliceman. The first place they made for was a tavern called the Four Swans, where Captain Fortescue was known to lodge. They did not find him there, but they found no others than Hum and Pinchfee who had arrived thither in their search for Tichbourne.

‘And what in the name of Protestant glory, seek ye,’ quoth Hum.

‘One John Ballard, calling himself Captain Fortescue,’ replied Trapdoor.

Jabez Pinchfee gripped the valiant Hum's arm in the extremity of his terror. 'All is discovered,' whispered he.

'Peace, idiot,' said Nicholas, and then addressing the officers, 'May I inquire the reason for thy duty, friends. I have invitation to crack a bottle of maligo with Captain Fortescue and would fain learn his sin.'

'He is accused of being a Jesuit in disguise,' growled Trapdoor.

'Oh—h—h' said Pinchfee shaking.

'I will maintain his accuser to be a scurvy knave,' returned Hum, drawing his sword. 'I trust that I have not hasted to accept the hospitality of any such. God's bones, but my stomach heaves at the thought. A Jesuit! Faugh! Let me have a stoup of Rhenish *instantly*! The *best*, host! Marry, bring enough for these gallant gentlemen, my uncle here (hold up, dear sir), will be at charges—and we will drink to the Queen and the Protestant Faith.'

The countenance of the officers relaxed, but Sergeant Sliceman, a true bully of Whitefriars stepped out and surveyed the speaker.

‘Captain Hum an am I not mistaken,’ said he.

‘The same,’ returned Hum. ‘Captain Nicholas Hum, musketeer, cavalier, bon camerado, and ready for any man with all weapons afoot or on horseback.’

‘Dost not know me?’

‘Very intimately. Thou art the tallow faced knave I beat for tearing Molly Featherbranes ruff on the night Mother Wagtail’s cat kittened on the arm chair of the ale wife of Wapping. I am a man of circumstantial memory.’

There was a roar, and Sergeant Sliceman drew his rapier.

‘Not here,’ said Baskethilt knocking up the weapon. ‘We are on Queen’s service.’

‘Nay, let him be,’ said Hum. ‘An he offers at me, I’ll slit his nose with my dagger and send him back to Mock Beggars Hall. But here comes the liquor. Let us drink, I bear no malice, not I. Come boys.

“From riding a jade that will start at a feather
Or ending a journey with loss of much leather,
From the folly of dying for grief or despair
With our heads in the water, or heels in the air,
Great Bacchus, defend us.”

‘*Supernagulum*, gentlemen; *supernagulum*!’

‘Thy health, valiant captain,’ said Basket-hilt, ‘but we must not linger. Our bird is marked and must be netted.’

‘After him, by all means and paths,’ quoth Hum. ‘I would that I could aid you. But—

“Tipple and tipple it round,
Here’s to thy fool
And here’s to my fool
Though it cost us, wench, many a pound.”

‘Brave Baskethilt, I am thine to the centre of the earth.’

‘Come, come,’ growled Trapdoor, ‘I cannot waste all night here. Finish thy liquor, and come on. To Southampton House, and failing that, to the Stag in the Fields. Wilt accompany us, captain?’

‘Not I, by the bellies of Saul’s father’s asses, until the liquor be done. Go, get thee to thy worldly wars and leave me to study the sublime science of drunkenness.

“I’ll drink till my cheeks are stain’d as the skies
Though the pale coloured student will pout me,
Till my nose like a comet sets fire to my eyes,
And I tear the horizon about me.

"And if all make me fall, then my heels shall divine
What the stars are adoin'g without me.

"I care not a curse for Platonical rules
Or the receipts of old Aristotle,
Those who think to find learning in books are but
fools,
True *Philosophy* lies in the *Bottle*."

'So get you gone. There will be the
more liquor for me.'

'The fool is drunk,' said Sergeant Slice-
man contemptuously, 'Let us be gone.'

And they trooped downstairs.

'Not so drunk but that he can lend thee
his own brains and then drink thee into a
fever,' quoth Hum under his breath.

'Come, Master Pinchfee, let us be jogging.
We must get to Southampton House before
these fellows. Maybe 'tis of them that
Babington sent warning.'

'Tis like enough! like enough, good cap-
tain,' said the trembling usurer. 'I prithee
keep close to me, I am old and poor.'

'Murrain take thee, hurry then and warm
thy blood.'

So the little man trotting his best to keep
up with the captain's swaggering strides,
they reached Southampton House by the

shortest cuts known to them, and on a sign from Jabez were admitted.

‘I told thee I would return to slit thy plasand,’ roared Hum to the porter. ‘However, an thou wilt knock and announce me, I’ll spare thee.’

It was the sound of the knocking which roused Ballard.

In a few seconds Pinchfee had explained his errand.

‘We are betrayed,’ said Salisbury.

‘Not so,’ said Ballard. ‘An we had been betrayed *all* would have been arrested. ’Tis doubtless even as they say, that they have discovered me. Well I can bear my fortune. My arrest will divert suspicion from you and of our plan’s progress ; it will not be for long.’

‘I’ll answer for that,’ said Savage fiercely.

‘I must not be found here, let us to some tavern where our persons are unknown, and each be caught there in soldier-guise drinking.’

‘I will go with thee, friend,’ cried a voice for I love drinking,’

‘Who art thou?’

‘A messenger from Sir Anthony,’ said Jabez, hastily. ‘He has already saved my life and bears token from his honour.’

‘The which I produce,’ said Hum, drawing forth his safe conduct to Sir Amias, ‘and am ready to maintain the same with arms.’

‘What is thy message, friend?’ asked Abington.

‘That, good sir, I must keep for him to whom I am alone authorised to deliver it.’

‘And he is?’

Chidiock Tichbourne.’

‘Well, waste not time in talk. Let us to the Stag in the Fields, and sup,’ cried Savage.

‘Thou art a lad after my own heart,’ cried Hum. ‘I am with thee to the hilt of my dagger. To the Stag.’

‘Babington has chosen a mad messenger,’ said Telney.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WALTER GERRARD DISCOVERS WHO
MASTER GILBERT IS.

WALTER GERRARD did not remain long in the quarters where Hum had placed him. On the second day of the gallant captain's departure, the sick man found himself well enough to rise.

He was torn with anxiety about his own mission, and fears for the safety of the unknown girl. He had promised to keep close to the heels of Gifford, and he had allowed that wily Jesuit to escape him. He had pledged himself to befriend the stranger, and he had suffered her to be attacked and her friends betrayed. Duty on the one hand and love on the other pulled him hard.

'Let my horse be saddled,' said he at last.
'I will visit my kinsman Sir Amias Paulet.'

On his arrival at Chartley Manor he found his uncle in high dudgeon.

'There has been a letter for you here these two days,' said he.

'From whom.'

'From Phillips.'

'Ah! let me see it.' And tearing it open he read as follows.

'You have done well, but would have done better had you avoided a duel with your man. A better swordsman than you are met him and killed him. We have the letter. Place yourself under the direction of Sir Amias Paulet. What does your follower in London?'

'Could Hum have been recognised already,' thought Gerrard.

'Faith this Phillips has spies everywhere. How did he learn of my duel? Has Hum betrayed me? No, impossible. Place myself under the orders of Sir Amias Paulet. Well, I will do so.' And returning the letter to his uncle he said, 'I am at your service, sir.'

'Are you recovered sufficiently from your wound to ride.'

‘I have ridden from Stony Stratford.’

‘Canst take command of a troop of horse?’

‘As well as another.’

‘Get thee to the stable then, and choose thy nag. The Queen of Scots has desired to kill a buck in Texall Park to-day, and thou shalt attend her.’

As he left the chamber, Gerrard came face to face with a lady dressed in a pearled lustering gown, and having a bunch of roses in her hand.

It was the fair unknown, the page, the conspirator—Master Gilbert.

She uttered a cry, and catching him by the wrist, drew him through a side door leading into the apartments of the Queen of Scots.

‘Didst get my message?’

‘Yes.’

‘And delivered it.’

‘I was lying wounded, dear lady, but I gave thy letter to a trusty friend, who if he be not dead, has by this time placed it in the hands of thy—’

‘—Of my brother.’

‘Thy brother.’

‘Ay, didst think him aught else to me! Silly youth! There, thou wilt burn my hand with those eager lips! Thou hast done me great service, dear Master Walter I am Barbara Tichbourne, and—’

‘And mixed up in Babington’s conspiracy Oh sweet mistress, pray heaven that the warning arrives in time. Every step of your brother is watched, every letter intercepted and read.’

‘There is treachery somewhere, I know,’ said she, ‘but I fear to breathe my suspicions.’

‘You can count on me to aid you, an you will,’ said Gerrard, his heart beating.

‘Whither go you?’

‘To guard the Queen of Scots. She rides to Texall Park.’

‘*Thou* art to guard her.’

‘Ay.’

‘Thou, oh I fear—’

‘Thou fearest what!’

‘Nothing; I must not speak! Leave me.’

And she pushed him out of the door and ran to the Queen.

‘Madam, they have changed the guard. I fear they suspect our plans.’

Mary smiled sadly.

‘All is risked now,’ said she. ‘We must go on. I have given the signal! I have made *him* sure. Anthony Babington will either be waiting to rescue me or he will be in the Tower.’

Ten minutes after this the cavalcade, guarded by Walter Gerrard and a troop of twenty horse, rode out of the Manor Gates.

The Queen was in brilliant spirits and laughed excitedly, talking eagerly on all subjects to those around her.

Sir Amias Paulet watched the glittering party out of sight and as he turned from the casement said—

‘God help the poor woman! I have presentiment that I shall see thy face no more.’

CHAPTER XXX.

A CAROUSE.

THE advice of Ballard was followed, and the party adjourned to the Stag. Hum sat himself down resolved to wait until Tichbourne arrived. In due course Trapdoor and Openwork knocked and were admitted.

‘We seek Captain Fortescue,’ cried they. Nicholas shrunk into a door.

‘Here he is,’ said Ballard rising.

‘In the Queen’s name,’ cried Trapdoor.

‘Hush,’ said Ballard, ‘I guess the charge, shame me not before my friends here.’

‘We want not to shame thee,’ said Openwork, ‘come thou, but quietly, and you can tell what stories you please.’

As had been agreed on, the company drew their swords and made a show of rescue.

‘Put up your weapons,’ cried the pretended Fortescue, ‘I will not refuse to go with these gentlemen.’

‘Needs must when the devil drives,’ said Sergeant Sliceman.

‘Silence varlet,’ said Salisbury, and flung a brimmer of claret into his face.

‘Dost want bleeding,’ cried the bully and drew.

Tom Salisbury who was never happier than when in a quarrel, sprang upon the table and at the fourth pass ran the fellow clean through the body.

‘Thou shalt answer for this,’ said Trap-door.

‘At any moment,’ returned Salisbury. ‘Take the prisoner away, or by the Mass I’ll rescue him single handed.’

‘Oh, I’m slain,’ roared the sergeant.

‘Thou wert never born to die so honourable a death,’ said Salisbury, ‘quit.’

And in another moment the room was empty.

‘Come,’ cried Savage, ‘a message has been sent to Tichbourne, until he come let us be merry. Good mine host, there, send

someone to mop up the blood, and bring brimmers of Burgundy.'

'Oh, ye true-hearted and gallant blades,' cried Hum, 'would I had met thee sooner, drinking and fighting is all my joy, and ye seem to love both uncommonly.'

"Oh for a bowl of fat canary,
Rich Aristippus sparkling sherry!
Some nectar wine from Juno's dairy!
O these draughts would make us merry.
O———"

'But then, why quote verse! Music is in the liquor!'

'Thou art a right merry fellow,' said Savage. 'I'll warrant me thy history is a strange one.'

'Marry, 'tis! I've seen life in all its phases. I've starved in the kitchen and kissed in the parlour. I've made ardent love vows on a silk cushion, and courted the widow of a musketeer's company in a truss of hay. I've drunk more bad liquor than any man of my inches, and still cling like a babe to the breast of the almighty mother. I can fight, drink, and swear.

For love making I am growing somewhat old, and find that old time hath clawed me. So ye have my history. But here is the wine! Let us apply ourselves to the serious business of life! Wine!

“ ‘Wine will make us fresh as roses
And our sorrows all forget,
Let us fuddle well our noses—
Drink yourself quite out of debt.
When grim death is looking for us
While we’re a-singing o’er our bowls,
Bacchus joining in our chorus
Cries “Depart, here’s none but souls.”

‘A health!’

‘*Madre du dios!* An excellent song,’ growled Salisbury. ‘Come, captain, an that be thy designation, give us a right rollicking stave; one that shall shatter the windows and rouse Erebus.’

‘I will give thee,’ said Hum, ‘one of my own composing, that shall lift Satan out of his boots, and burst his hat band. Ay, though he wore Cordova leather for the one, and a double cable gold chain for t’other!’

And exerting his powerful lungs to their

utmost pitch, the glorious captain sang the following—

“Stay, stay, shut the gate
T’other quart, faith, ’tis not too late
As your thinking,
Those stars which you see
In this hemisphere be

The studs in your cheeks from your drinking.
The sun’s gone to tippie in the sea, boys !
To-morrow he’ll wish that he’s paler than we, boys !
Drink wine ! Give him water ! ’Tis sack makes us
jee, boys !

Drink, drink off your bowls,
We’ll enrich both our heads and our souls
With canary,
A carbuncled face
Saves a tedious race

For the Indies about us we carry.
We bang up good faces, we’ll drink till our noses
Give freedom to speak what our fancy disposes
And all our lips say shall be under the roses.

This ! this must go round,
Off your hats, till that the pavement be crowned
With your beavers,
A red coated face
Frights a sergeant amace,
And the constable tremble to shivers.

In State march our faces like those of the Quorum
When the wenches face down and the vulgar adore them
And our noses like link-boys, run shining before them.”

A volley of applause followed this effort,

and in the midst of it there burst in Tichbourne.

‘Are ye all mad, yelling and whooping when our lives are not worth an hour’s purchasing? Who is it that hath message for me?’

‘I,’ said Hum, sobered by the sudden silence, and he handed him the note.

‘Who gave you this, fellow?’ asked Tichbourne somewhat paler than his wont.

‘That is no business of thine,’ said Hum sturdily ‘thou hast it.’

A dozen swords were at his heart in an instant.

‘He said Babington sent him,’ said Savage.

‘Who speaks of Babington?’ cried a voice and Sir Anthony hurriedly entered.

‘If then you must know, I got the note from Master Gilbert’s own hands,’ said Hum. ‘This is a good reward for a ninety mile ride.’

‘Release him,’ said Tichbourne, and the captain was allowed to rise.

‘Listen, knave,’ said Tichbourne ‘I am going to trust thee. Depart.’

‘Thou art a valiant gentleman,’ said Hum appeased, ‘and in return for thy courtesy I will tell thee a piece of news that may interest thee. Thou art betrayed. Walshingham knows thy plans and has read thy letters. Follow the advice given thee. Fly,’ and before the conspirators recovered from the surprise which this news occasioned he was gone.

The young men stood staring at one another.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DRAWING LOTS.

TICHBOURNE was the first to break silence.

‘Our only chance is instant action, if what this swashbuckler says be true, there is but one way to safety—the death of the Queen. Mary is the legitimate successor to the throne, and Elizabeth once dead all England will rise with us. We have gone too far to retreat. The dice!’

They threw in silence, and the lot fell upon Savage.

‘I am fortunate,’ said he and sprang to his feet. ‘The Queen goes to Westminster to-night, I will to the palace.’

‘Thou canst not go in that dress,’ said Abington, ‘the usher will not suffer thee.’

Babington tore a gold chain from his neck and flung it upon the table. 'Sell that,' he cried, 'any goldsmith will give thee fifty crowns for it. Come gentlemen, to work.'

'Let us divide our forces,' said Tichbourne. 'Babington with Salisbury, Gage, and Charnock will mount and ride for the north. Lie beneath Highgate Hill until Bellamy makes the signal that the deed is done, then gallop, spreading the news as you go, and rescue Mary. I, Telney and the rest will stay here to await events. Abington will go with Savage and bring us news. So a health to our enterprise.'

'But where is Gifford?' asked Babington.

'Waiting at Southampton House for me,' said Tichbourne.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BELLS RING BACKWARDS.

BABINGTON and his companions galloped out of London and lay in the woods at Hornby waiting for the signal.

Tichbourne and Telney sat in the inn with a servant holding their horses beneath the open window.

The night sounds of London came up all around them. Suddenly down the almost deserted street came a galloping horse. Nearer and nearer it came. The two looked out and saw Abington, the reins in his left hand, and his right hand pressed on his side, riding a horse bleeding from a pike wound.

‘Savage is taken, we are betrayed, fly!’

he cried, and rolling out of his saddle he fell dead.

Tichbourne and Telney leapt out of the window, sprang upon their horses and dashed towards Holborn. 'We must warn Gifford,' said loyal Tichbourne.

But at Southampton House a strange sight presented itself. The roadway was turned up and musketeers guarded the pathway. The building itself was brilliantly lighted, and armed figures could be seen through the windows.

'Halt, in the Queen's name,' cried the officer of musketeers, stepping out in front of the barricade.

Tichbourne uttered a wild shout of defiance, and cut him down with one sweep of his sword. The musketeers levelled and fired, but Tichbourne spurred his horse at the barricade and cleared it unhurt.

Not so Telney, his horse was shot dead under him, and he was hurled into the very middle of the guard. 'On Chidiock, on! I am taken,' he cried.

Chidiock Tichbourne flung away his

sword sheath, his heavy cloak and the valise that was bound to his saddle.

‘My life is in my horse’s legs now,’ he said, and headed for Highgate. As he topped the hill he saw in the city below him the glow of unwonted lights, and a strange and angry hum arose. Then on the clear air came the wild clash of backward jangled bells.

‘The City was up.’

He paused an instant, and then his quick ear caught the measured cadence of horses’ feet galloping in concert.

He was pursued.

‘They shall not find us easy to capture,’ said he and he plunged into the woods to the rendezvous where Babington awaited him.

‘How will it fare with Mary?’ was his last thought.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AMBUSH IN THE WOOD.

CHIDIOCK TICHBOURNE rode into Highgate at midnight as had been agreed, there streamed from the belfry tower of Bellamy's House a light shaded by a crimson curtain.

This red ominous light warned Tichbourne that the house was deserted, and, turning his horse with a curse he made for the rendezvous in the wood of St. John.

The southern parts of Hampstead and that pretty suburb now devoted to the residences of small merchants were at the time of which we write reaches of hilly forest carefully conserved and nearly impenetrable. Turning down various forest paths with the easy rapidity of one who

traverses ways well known to him, Tichbourne reached a sort of hut hidden in the dense thickets of the valley of the forest.

At the sound of the approaching hoofs half-a-dozen men started forth, and he found his horse's bridle seized.

It was Babington.

'Well! All is lost?'

'All is lost.'

'Tell me.'

Tichbourne gloomily recounted the events of the evening and Babington sighed.

'We shall be the laughing stock of England,' said he.

'There but remains one thing.'

'And that?'

'Is to strike Terror.'

'Strike terror! How? Our forces are dispersed.'

'I know it.'

'Our hopes of aid are ruined.'

'It is true.'

'What can we five men do against an army?'

'Much! Die!'

'Ah!' said Gage, 'you are right. Let us get ready.'

From the neighbouring hill came the crash of branches.

‘The pursuers are upon us,’ said Tom Salisbury. ‘Bring on the horses.’

The preparations for defence were as follows :

The five horses were placed in the kitchen of the hut, each haltered by a rope, and having his reins passed over the pommel. Round the kitchen ran a wooden balcony. Charnock and Tichbourne garrisoned that portion of the miniature fortification, Salisbury and Gage occupied the right wing commanding the approaches to the bridle path, while Babington alone remained in the front chamber.

A troop of horsemen appeared in the entrance to the little glade.

Their leader advancing, waved a white handkerchief.

‘Kill him,’ cried fierce Salisbury.

‘Nay, for thy life,’ said Babington fiercely.

‘He bears a flag of truce.’

‘Go thou and parley with him then,’ said the other.

Tying his handkerchief on the point of

his sword Babington walked out in front of the hovel door. The officer advanced to meet him. 'What dost thou seek?'

'Thee and thy companions.'

'Wherefore?'

The officer half drew a paper from his doublet. 'I have warrant sufficient, believe me.'

'Arrested?'

'For high treason.'

'You mistake, sir,'

'Not so,' returned the officer. 'I am instructed to pursue and capture Sir Anthony Babington, Captain Salisbury, Chidiock Tichbourne of Hants, Charnock and Gage, late musketeers in the forty-five Guards. Is the list right?'

'We refuse to surrender,' said Babington, seeing that further discussion was hopeless.

'Then I must do my duty.'

'And that is?'

'To take ye dead or alive!'

'Fall back, sir, in the name of Queen Mary the Second,' cried Babington and a great cheer rose from the devoted little party.

In another instant the troop of horses were in motion.

‘When they gain yon strip of shadow,’ said Babington calmly, ‘Fire.’

The others clutched the butts of the heavy arquebuses closer.

‘We are provisioned for four days,’ said Babington, ‘fear nothing, but fight boldly.’

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FIGHT OF FIRE.

THE little army marched slowly down the glade. 'Fire,' said Babington.

The volley of five matchlocks rang out and five saddles emptied themselves.

The horses below neighed grievously.

The troop closed up at the trot and returned the volley by firing pistols.

'They will not hurt us at that rate,' said Salisbury.

The time to recover, load and to fire an arquebuse was allowed by good soldiers to be two minutes and a half.

The troop dashed on and surrounded the house. 'The door,' cried the leader. 'The door.'

Three men dashed themselves against it, but to no purpose.

Sir James Betzhanger, the officer in command, fired his pistol into the lock.

At that instant a tearing volley burst from within the house, and four of the soldiers choked the doorway.

Sir James thrust his empty pistol smoking into his belt, and bursting the shattered door with his foot, leapt into the apartment.

He was confronted by a wild figure blackened with powder, and wild with rage. It was Sir Anthony Babington. 'In the name of the Queen !'

'Which Queen ?'

'Queen Elizabeth.'

'Fire,' cried Babington, and again that deadly hail poured downstairs and through loopholes.

Sir James Betzhanger crossed blades with Babington, but the crowd pressing behind drove him in upon him.

Babington parried twice with his cloak, and at the fifth rally ran his antagonist through the shoulder.

'Fire,' said the calm tone of Tichbourne

from the corridor, and four more of the assailants fell.

Sir James, bleeding and faint drew back, and Babington seized advantage of that moment to spring into the kitchen and drop the oak bar.

Thirty men burst in over the table barricade the next instant and surged against the doorway, a loud laugh and the plunging of the terrified horses were the only response.

‘Fire,’ cried Tichbourne again, and from out the ammunitioned apartment above burst a third roar.

‘We must take that place,’ said Sir James Betzhanger.

At his word a dozen men sprang at the rafters and clutched with their naked hands the ragged edges of those holes in the ceiling from which were vomited death and flames. ‘Load ye,’ said Tichbourne, giving the arquebuses to his companion, and kneeling he plunged his dagger into three of the six throats which were upturned to him.

The corpses fell, spouting blood, and a shower of pistol balls tore up the wood around him.

‘Oh, that we had but heavier arms,’ cried Sir James Betzhanger, and as he spoke a fourth crashing volley from the concealed party tore through the crowded room.

‘The door, the door,’ shouted Sir James. ‘Holt, round with thee to the back and attack them in the rear! Greatorrex, take that pole in the outhouse yonder, and batter in the window In the name of the Queen, forward.’

The attack recommenced with greater fury, and the roof began to burn, fired by the pistol shots of the attacking troop.

‘Yield ye, gentlemen,’ cried Betzhanger, ‘your cause is lost, believe me.’

‘We’ll never yield,’ cried Salisbury, fiercely, ‘come up, stake us.’

At that instant the door gave way to the blows of the rude ram and the assailants beheld Babington, his sword between his teeth, and an arquebuse in his hand waiting. The Lieutenant, Ingoldsby Vane, sprang upon him, and as he sprang, the great ball of the arquebuse crashed through his brain and he fell dead. His brother, a cornet in the same troop, took his place, and before

Babington could discharge his pistols, pricked him in the throat, with a rapid attack in *tierce*; fiercely calm as though in his fencing school, the young man parried the furious thrusts, until at last the inexperienced boy too hastily lunging exposed his side, and the next instant fell dead, with the hilt of Babington's rapier creasing the lace on his doublet.

'Forward, will ye all be baffled by one man?' roared Sir James, and bounding like a tiger into the narrow way, he made Babington recoil with a sword thrust through his thigh.

For an instant the room seemed won, but stepping back all wounded as he was Anthony Babington, with two rapid strokes cut the halters of the now maddened horses and in another moment the assailants were struck down, swept away, annihilated beneath the rush of trampling hoofs.

'Fire,' cried the steady voice above, and as the remnant of the assailants fled out of that den of smoke and blood, a sheet of flame was poured upon them from the bell topped mouths of the huge arquebuses.

Babington gained the upper story, bleeding but free.

‘Well,’ said Gage fiercely, ‘Well, we have done wonders.’

‘It cannot last,’ said Salisbury grimly.

‘We may beat them off and fly,’ said Tichbourne.

‘The horses are gone,’ said Babington grimly, ‘I sacrificed them to save us.’

‘Then we will die nobly,’ said Tichbourne sternly. ‘Gentlemen, load.’

The bugle sounded below, and once more the troop came on. This time there was no opposition below, and they gained the staircase.

‘Fire,’ commanded Tichbourne sternly. Alas, only two men fell.

‘The powder is wet,’ cried Gage.

Tichbourne burst in the head of the small barrel with his foot, and lifted the powder with his hands. It was no longer dry and granulated, but moist and pasty.

‘Give me a match,’ he said, and taking the one with which Salisbury had vainly endeavoured to fire his weapon, he stuck it butt downwards on the barrel.

Then flinging wide the door he cried, 'Come up, gentlemen.'

Five men instantly showed themselves at the head of the stairs, and ten swords instantly clashed.

Each of the conspirators fought like one possessed. Death was on all sides of them. Death awaited them, even if they escaped the swords, the bullets and the explosion of gunpowder.

Salisbury began to sing. Tichbourne laughed when he thrust home. Babington prayed aloud as he fought.

The room was slippery with blood.

The troop of Sir James Betzhanger pressing on to the attack felt themselves entering into a wild beasts' den—a house full of madmen.

At last Gage fell hamstrung.

Salisbury, his sword broken, killed a soldier with a blow of his fist, and was cut down. Charnock, bleeding from twenty wounds, had fainted.

There remained but ten men to confront Babington and Tichbourne.

'Yield,' cried Sir James Betzhanger, staunching his blood with his scarf.

For answer Tichbourne drew back and pointed to the powder barrel.

The fuse was within a nail's breadth of the powder.

At sight of this the ten men plunged for the door.

'Cowards,' cried Sir James feebly. 'If ye cannot conquer, remain and die.'

But this appeal was in vain.

Stumbling over each other in their haste, the troopers reached the stairs and gained the lower room.

Tichbourne uttered a ghastly laugh, and raising the keg in both hands, he flung it from the gallery upon them.

The rapid transit of the barrel through the air hastened the burning of the fuse. The barrel fell and the red spark glowed, sputtered, hissed, the damp powder puffed and cracked, and then with one terrific crash the side walls of the room opened. A column of fire and smoke shot up, and the three men standing alone in the darkness, felt something warm fall upon them like rain. They opened their eyes and saw that the rain was blood.

The fore part of the house had been blown out, and they stood alone on a platform heaped with corpses, the conquerors of thirty men.

Sir James Betzhanger attempted to draw his dagger, but found it impossible; his arm was shattered.

‘Kill me, gentlemen,’ said he; ‘I must not survive this disgrace.’

For reply Tichbourne lifted his noble head, and with a hand still white, despite the blood it had shed, pointed to the entrance to the glade.

A second troop had halted there, and were deploying so as to surround the ruined house.

‘We have done all that brave gentlemen may,’ said Tichbourne. ‘Heaven does not will that we escape.’

And passing his arm round his friend’s neck, he sat down amid the carnage to await his fate.

Sir James Betzhanger looked at the two enthusiasts, and soldier as he was, felt something rise from his heart to his eyes and roll down upon his beard. It was a tear!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RIDE TO TEXALL PARK.

THE cavalcade of the Queen of Scots swept on to Sir Walter Aston's Park, and seven miles of the nine had been accomplished, when the Queen uttered a cry.

'What ails your Majesty?' said Barbara Tichbourne.

'Look yonder.'

'I see nothing.'

'Look again, girl, there by the beeches.'

Barbara Tichbourne bent her black brows,

'I see the glitter of arms.'

'I thought so,' said the Queen, ''Tis he, Babington.' Barbara clasped her hands.

'Pray heaven that it be so,' she murmured. Gerrard halted the troop.

Barbara pressed her hand to her side. Was her lover to be sacrificed in the forthcoming struggle?

‘Why dost stop us?’ asked the Queen.

‘I know not what manner of men these riders yonder may be, madam,’ replied Gerrard, and drew his sword.

The gates of Texall Park were in sight, as the Queen thus charged reined her palfrey. In another moment the advancing troop were upon them.

‘Babington is not there,’ gasped Mary in amaze.

‘Stand,’ cried Gerrard, ‘on whose business do ye ride thus?’

‘Her Majesty the Queen’s,’ said a grave young man, one Sir Thomas Gorges, and presented as he spoke a folded paper.

‘What is it?’ cried Mary. Gerrard showed it to her.

It was an order signed *Elizabeth* for the arrest of Nan and Curle, and her own immediate removal to Texall. Desperate as when fate had previously overtaken her on the slope at Carberry, Mary raged in passionate invective.

‘Those who love me, fight for me!’ she cried, and spurred her horse onwards as though to lead an army.

But the servants, outnumbered and overawed by the palpable presence of the Queen’s signature, only scowled sullenly.

Barbara Tichbourne’s eyes sought those of Gerrard. Obedient to their pleading he came to her side.

‘What wouldst thou?’

‘Save her.’

‘Impossible!’

‘A bullet through yon gallant horse, a rally for your troop, and she is free. An she reaches London, a hundred friends—’

‘Do not delude thyself thus. She is betrayed, and her friends by this time in the Tower.’

‘Gerrard! Walter! you remain with us, for my sake, if ever you would win aught of me!’

The cold voice of Sir Thomas Gorges broke in.

‘Captain Gerrard.’

‘I am here, sir.’

‘An order for you, sir. You will escort

these two gentlemen to London. Take ten of my troop.'

'But—'

'The order is imperative.'

'The Queen?'

'I will convey Her Highness.'

'Whither?'

'To Texall Park.'

It was useless to remonstrate. Gerrard cast one glance at the weeping maid of honour, which meant—'If I can return I will. If we never meet again I love thee,' and so gave the word to his troop.

The captured Queen rode on to Texall with gloomy forebodings.

At that place she was detained two hours. Refreshment was offered, but declined. In the greatest impatience, Mary waited for the next move in the game which had gone against her.

Sir Thomas Gorges proffered speech, but she would not listen to him.

'How long am I to be kept here?' she only asked.

At three in the afternoon a messenger came galloping from Chartley.

‘The Queen of Scots was to return.’

Riding in silence as fast as courtesy to his prisoner would warrant, Gorges reached the great gates of Chartley Manor.

A crowd of beggars thronged the entrance and besought the customary alms.

‘I have nothing for you, good people,’ cried Mary bitterly and in a loud tone. ‘I am a beggar as well as you, all is taken from me.’

In the ante-room Paulet waited for her. She was about to go into her waiting-room, but he made as though he would bar her path.

A sudden divination of the reason for the delay at Texall came upon her, and with a cry of rage, she darted into the chamber.

It was a wreck. Drawers open, broken keys in bunches on the floor, ribbons and burst parchments on the chairs and window places.

Her cyphers had been captured. All that laboured correspondence which contained the lives of the best blood of England, which bore evidence of her own guilt, and gave mute witness to her own treachery, all was

in the hands of her deadliest foe. She had been betrayed to her death !

‘And whom have I to thank for this last insult ?’ said she turning to Paulet.

Sir Amias was a true subject of Elizabeth, but he liked not his share in the business which had ended so fatally.

He stepped back bowing gravely, and his place was taken by another person, tall, angular, gaunt.

‘Your Highness may bestow your thanks upon me.’

It was Master Phillips.

‘Viper !’ said the Queen, and then with a terrible gesture of rage and despair waved him back a pace.

‘Not there ! not there,’ she said.

He had been standing on the spot where Babington had embraced her on the day when she had given him his fatal mission.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TORTURE CHAMBER IN THE TOWER.

THE Tower rack stood in the long vaulted dungeon below the armoury, the rack was of simple construction. It was a machine which possessed four collars two at each extremity. Into the two upper collars the wrists were fastened and into the two lower the ankles. Two strong men stood at the head and feet of the sufferer, and at a signal turned a capstan round which a chain was coiled. Each turn at the capstan drew the wrists and ankles wider apart. When the person to be tormented had endured as much agony as he might by this process, another capstan was turned which drew his spread eagled extremities further from the

trunk. Many brave men endured this stretching, but when their wrists snapped, their shoulders slipped out, their knee pans cracked, or the muscles of their hams burst they not unfrequently shrieked out a name or two. Upon this engine lay Ballard. The commissioners, among whom was Walshingham, attended to take down his depositions. They had already attended three times without result. The Jesuit, pale, bloody, quivering with pain had not opened his lips.

‘Wilt thou not confess thy mission?’

‘I have confessed it.’

‘The names of thy accomplices.’

‘No.’

The rack turned and there was heard a sound as of cracking leather.

‘Again.’

The men sweating bent at the levers.

‘Kill me,’ cried the unhappy man, ‘kill me.’

‘We will, traitor, but not yet,’ said Topham.

At that instant a man entered without knocking. It was the ubiquitous Phillips

‘Well?’

‘All safe. She is at Chartley. Nan and Curle are secure.’

‘And the people?’

‘London is roaring. The Protestants are lighting bonfires. The prisoners were twice nearly torn from their horses.’

‘The prisoners! What prisoners?’

‘The conspirators.’

‘Have ye them, then?’

‘Of course,’ said Phillips.

‘All!’

‘All!’

‘Phillips, thou art a jewel,’ cried Walsingham.

‘Not a very costly one,’ grunted Phillips.

The Minister took no heed of this observation, but, with a wave of his hand to the headsman, hurried from the room.

The executioners unbound the almost expiring Ballard and laid him on some straw.

‘Alas, Father Ballard,’ said Phillips, ‘to what has thy zeal brought thee?’

‘I confessed nothing,’ answered the priest.

‘Be easy, nothing. Had I arrived sooner I should have spared thee this torment. Thou hast been left nothing to confess. We have captured the men thou hath misled to their death.’

‘Nay, nay,’ groaned the other, ‘say not misled.’

‘The best blood of England is on thy head.’

‘Then they will die martyrs,’ cried Ballard sternly. ‘What better fate can men desire?’

Phillips, who never felt a ray of enthusiasm at anything save the sight of a bag of money, looked at the bleeding body before him with admiration not unmingled with contempt.

‘I wish I had known you earlier,’ he said.

‘You are a villain,’ said Ballard.

‘Possibly; but I am not an unsuccessful rebel,’ returned Phillips. ‘Until we meet—’

He was already at the door when the other called him back.

‘And *all* are captured?’

‘All.’

‘The trial?’

‘At once! To-night perhaps. To-morrow certainly.’

‘Let it come quickly,’ said the brave man closing his eyes.

The heavy door clashed, and the assistants at a sign from Phillips lifted the tortured man and carried him to his cell.

Though they tormented their prisoners in the Tower, they did not starve them. The cell was a roomy chamber in one of the Tower walls, lighted by a lamp, and possessing a bed and a table. Having his face bandaged a man sat on the bed.

He rose to receive the party and his fetters jangled.

Ballard opened his eyes.

‘Gifford.’

‘Alas, I am taken also,’ said Gifford. ‘The cause is lost.’

‘How came it about.’

‘Hush,’ said Gifford. ‘The leech will be here to dress your wounds anon. Take some wine, recruit your strength, by and by we can talk.’

The men withdrew and Master Phillips,

smiling softly to himself opened a door, and hurrying up a narrow staircase squeezed himself into a niche between the large stones and applied his ear to a slit in the wall.

‘What will he say?’ said he. He was in fact within earshot of the two prisoners.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE JUDAS HOLE.

FOR some minutes after the retreating steps of Master Phillips had died away in the corridor, the two priests sat silent. Then Gifford spoke.

‘Hast not said aught?’

‘I hope not,’ returned the other.

‘They have captured Babington.’

‘How dost know?’

‘I heard them say it.’

‘And thyself?’

‘I was taken at Highgate, together with Bellamy.’

‘But Tichbourne, that lion-heart, that gallant gentleman.’

‘He is captured also. They made a desperate fight, but were overpowered.’

‘Then of all our company, not one is spared.’

‘Not one, Abington and Savage are already in custody.’

‘And the Queen.’

‘Heaven knows what of her,’ said Gifford.

‘Did she ride forth from Chartley as agreed?’

‘I fear so.’

‘And found none to rescue her! Oh unhappy Mary.’

‘But unless Babington betrays her, they will know nothing.’

‘Some one has betrayed her already,’ said Ballard.

‘I fear so,’ said Gifford. ‘Pray that the letters have escaped.’

‘Ah!’ said Ballard. ‘Those letters once in Walshingham’s hands there is no hope.’

‘I fear none,’ returned Gifford.

‘Yet where could the treachery have been,’ continued Ballard half to himself and half to his companion. ‘*Thou* didst convey them from the Manor. Dost suspect any one on the road?’

‘I had my suspicions, I confess,’ said

Gifford drily, 'but it boots not now to speak them.'

'Nay! nay! But it *does*, out with thy thoughts.'

'What thinkest thou of—but no.'

'Say on, of whom?'

'Of Tichbourne himself.'

'Tichbourne! Impossible! Sooner would I believe *thee* guilty! Tichbourne! He who planned the whole method of attack, who schemed the line of posts, who invented the method of entrance into Chartley! Impossible!'

''Twas either he or Babington,' said Gifford calmly.

'Nay, thou dreamest, Gifford. Babington is in the Queen's heart. She loves him. She has given him proof of favour. He hath confessed it unto me! Babington! Why he has sworn to me a thousand times that he would kill Elizabeth with his own hands rather than one hair of his mistress' head should fall. No! no! We must look elsewhere.'

'Savage, then.'

'Savage! Why he rode from Holland

hither to be present at the work. He is a man whose fault lies in being too frank and open of soul.'

'Dost think that Mendoza or Morgan have played us false?'

'What should they gain by it?'

'The London College.'

'I doubt it. No! no! the treachery has been where treachery always is—among those most trusted.'

'That is possible,' said Gifford.

A silence fell in the chamber. Ballard turning with difficulty upon his side, addressed himself to sleep. Gifford sat watching him with a strange smile on his white face. Presently Ballard began to murmur as he slept. Gifford bent his ear to listen, and distinguished the words of a Latin prayer.

Master Phillips observing from his spy-hole all that had passed, shut up his notebook, took his ear from the trumpet and his eye from the chink, smiled in his turn, and descended the stairs. As he reached the corridor he was met by a servant.

'What now?'

‘Sir Thomas Wade commands the attendance of the prisoner.’

‘Where?’

‘In the small hall.’

‘At this hour?’

‘Her Majesty is there.’

‘Her Majesty,’ cried Phillips, and hurried away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ELIZABETH'S PROFESSION OF FAITH.

PHILLIPS found the small hall, which is to the left of the entrance from the Beauchamp Tower, lighted and filled with people.

Elizabeth, who in moments like these was ever energetic and foremost in pushing inquiry, on hearing of the arrest of the prisoners had hurried to the Tower.

The noblemen and gentlemen who formed the commission, were standing round the chair on which she sat. Lord Cobham, the warden of the Cinque Ports, together with Sir Roger Manwood, Chief Baron of the Exchequer, and Sir Christopher Hatton, stood on her left hand. On her right

were Thomas Lord Buckhurst, Sir Francis Knowles, Sir Christopher Wray, the Chief Justice of England, and Sir Edmund Anderson, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. Behind her chair leant Sir Francis Walsingham, Sir James Croft, and Sir Thomas Wade or Waad, the governor of the Tower.

As Phillips entered and made his way to his patron, he heard the Queen say in the high tone she used when excited—

‘God’s death, gentlemen, this is no slight matter. This is no conspiracy of a half-mad priest and a wholly mad serving-man, like that of which I last year rid me. This concerns graver interests, and I will have it sifted to the bottom.’

‘What ails her?’ whispered Phillips to Sir James Croft.

‘She will examine the priest herself,’ said he in the same tone.

‘They have but just racked him.’

‘No matter. An he were dying she would have him brought an so she willed it.’

In fact, in a few minutes the half lifeless form of Ballard was brought in, and laid at a little distance.

‘So this is the traitor,’ cried the Queen. ‘Lift up his head that we may see him. What are ye?’

‘Your Grace’s servant,’ said Ballard.

‘A rebellious servant. And so thou wouldst murder me.’

‘I lifted not hand against thee,’ said Ballard.

‘No knave, but thou didst compel others thereto. What punishment is fit for thee?’

‘Your Majesty is my judge.’

‘Fore God, the fellow mocks us,’ cried the Queen. ‘Speak out, villain! What hope of preferment hadst thou for this deed?’

‘None save the advancement of true religion,’ said Ballard boldly.

‘Religion! What religion? I am sick of the name,’ cried Elizabeth, startled out of herself by her wrath. ‘From my birth I have been the symbol of revolt against this religion! Religion! cried His Holiness, and would have discrowned me in my cradle. Religion! cried the shuffling Puritans when I would make my people merry. By this light, gentlemen, neither chapels or conven-

ticles shall rule England while *I* am strong enough to rule it.'

'Nay! Nay. But the opinions of your Highness' subjects,' said Walshingham, who seemed not unwilling to fan the flame. 'We must respect opinions.'

'Opinions,' cried the Queen. 'Let the fools then pay for their opinions, and have their sacraments or their sermons at home. The priests have had fire and fetters at their back too long. We will administer justice for the future.'

'Is this justice, madam?' said Ballard in a hollow voice, and suddenly protruding his scarred and swollen arm.

Elizabeth recoiled for a moment.

'Have ye tortured him?'

'We have questioned him,' said Wade.

'Legally questioned him,' said Sir Christopher Wray.

'My blood is on your heads,' said Ballard.

'Tush,' said Elizabeth, recovering her composure, 'you suffer for your treason.'

'I have committed no treason,' said Ballard boldly, 'for I've no allegiance.'

'What!' cried the Queen uprising. 'By

my father's spirit but this is too much. Mark me now, traitor. We make no inquiry into our subjects' faith, but they must obey the laws. God's death, no man, Pope or Pagan, shall meddle or make in *our* kingdom. To whom is thy allegiance, then?'

'To my master the Pope,' said Ballard. 'First to the Pope, then to the Sovereign.'

'And it is with this pretty doctrine that thou hast betrayed a company of gallant English gentlemen to their death. Art so blind as not to see that thou servest but as a tool in the hands of men more ambitious and less daring than thyself. First to the Pope, sayest thou! the Pope thy master.'

''Twas my word,' said Ballard.

'You hear him, gentlemen,' said Elizabeth, lashing herself into one of her memorable rages, 'you hear him. His master the Pope! Learn, sirrah, that there is no other master in England but ME! I! elected by the voice of my loving and free subjects, rule in this little island of England. If thy master the Pope choose to come and live here, he shall have freedom to pray in his

own fashion, and abide securely according to our laws; but an he conspire against our government and liberties, by the splendour of God an we will hang him as we would any other traitor !'

And sweeping her great farthingale forward, the Queen—her eyes flashing and her hands clenched, swept out of the room followed by the alarmed council.

'What dost think of the Majesty of England ?' said Phillips, coolly.

'I think I could have served such a woman well, had she been of a different faith,' said the priest calmly. 'As it is, I will not shame mine own.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CONFESSION.

WALTER GERRARD having delivered his prisoners safely, betook himself with an uneasy heart to the chamber of Walshingham.

The streets through which he had ridden were lively with shouting crowds. Twice he had been stopped to catch a glimpse of the faces of the disarmed conspirators, reddened in the glare of the torch, pushed between the very halberts of the guards. His own men chafed at the delay and would fain have thrust the quaking secretaries among the conspirators' party had not their leader sternly forbidden such action. From the northern heights round the city bon-

fires flamed. From every steeple clashed joyful bells, and as the captured five passed through the shouting crowds they felt how vain had been the hope which bid them stir that great city to revolt.

‘They are dead men,’ said Gerrard involuntarily, as he thought of what he had seen.

‘You are right,’ said a voice in answer to his muttered sentence. ‘They are dead men indeed.’

‘Master Phillips?’

‘You have done well, sir.’

Gerrard sighed.

‘Dost thou not like the service?’

‘It is detestable,’ said Gerrard simply.

‘Then you shall leave it.’

‘I am ready.’

‘Not so fast,’ said Phillips, with his dark smile. ‘I have yet one more task for thee. Where is thy comrade?’

‘I—I’ stammered Gerrard, ‘I thought you knew, but you know not. I sent him to London.’

‘Wherefore?’

Gerrard looked this way and that, and

then bethinking him of the network of spies which surrounded him, resolved upon a bold course.

‘I sent him to warn Chidiock Tichbourne to fly.’

Phillips burst into a cry of rage.

‘You did that?’

‘And didn’t you know *that* also.’

‘Fool!’ said Phillips, stamping his foot, ‘you might have ruined all.’

‘I had no instructions concerning Tichbourne. I was told to watch Gifford.’

‘And you let him go.’

‘He nearly killed me,’ said Gerrard, pulling open his doublet, ‘yet with this wound I have ridden from Chartley Manor.’

‘Ah!’ said Phillips appeased, ‘you have obeyed orders. But why did you warn this Tichbourne?’

‘I love his sister.’

‘The maid to Mary of Scots?’

‘The same.’

Phillips grinned, and taking out his tablet made a note.

‘I have changed my intention concerning

you,' said he. 'Come to me four days hence.'

'Where?'

'At Lincolns Inn Fields.'

'At what hour?'

'Noon. And in the meantime go find thy comrade.'

And turning on his heel Phillips departed.

Gerrard walked gloomily to his inn soliloquising.

'To meet him four days hence and at Lincolns Inn Fields. What new adventure can he have for me?'

His speculations were interrupted by a tremendous blow on the shoulder, and turning he saw Hum.

'Now by Saint Paul but thou art welcome. Where hast been? How hast fared?'

'I have delivered thy message,' said Hum, 'but 'twas without avail! fate was against them!'

'And thyself?'

'I am keeping house.'

'Keeping house!'

'Ay, 'tis not mine own certainly, but still I use it as such.'

‘Explain thyself.’

‘I am a custodian, Miltiades.’

‘A what?’

‘A custodian, a private guard, a watch-dog, a cerberus with three mouths and liquor for them all.’

‘Leave thy follies, whereat what art thou?’

‘The sworn friend and protector of Master Jabez Pinchfee usurer and goldsmith. He confides in me to save him from the fangs of the law, and the embrace of the Tower Maiden.* I am therefore installed in his house, made free of his wine cellar, and the friend of his wife. Come and sup with us.’

‘Thou art a mad knave,’ cried Gerrard laughing, ‘but an no better fare offer I will go with thee.’

‘No *better* fare,’ roared Hum indignantly. ‘By the Red Cow, but he who dines with a usurer in dread of his life can rival Prester John for daintiness of eating. But here we are. Thou shalt see.’

* The Tower Maiden is an instrument of torture which compresses the victim’s heels and head together.

CHAPTER XL.

A SUPPER AT THE USURER'S.

GERRARD found Hum in his glory.

The usurer's house closely barred and bolted on the outside was within sparkling with lights and ruddy with good cheer.

The remorseless fellow had unpacked all the rich stuffs which formed the gains of the money changer, and hung them round the apartment. Magnificent caps and velvets glittered on the sideboard. Massy and shining arms gleamed from the wall, and Mistress Marjory half-crying half-laughing was busily setting forth an excellent supper of cold venison pasty and wine.

In the midst of the grandeur sat the poor little owner shivering with fright and

uttering feeble yelps of protest as every fresh magnificence revealed itself.

At sight of Gerrard he started up with a scream.

‘Fear not Atomy!’ cried Hum curling his moustachois. ‘’Tis my friend Captain Gerrard of the Queen’s Guards. He sups with me. *This*, noble sir,’ he continued turning to Gerrard and pointing to Pinchfee, ‘is Jabez Pinchfee, a worthy protestant, and a true subject of her Majesty the Queen! Is’t not so?’

‘Ay, by the Mass,’ stammered Pinchfee.

‘Swear not by the Mass, varlet, that is a vile Popish oath, and one not to be named in the hearing of good Protestants. Madge, my sweeting, a bottle of Malmsey wine, and thy good husband shall drink to the speedy destruction of all Papistical knaves. Shalt not, little Jabez?’

‘An’t—an’t please you, sir.’

‘Then fill up my weasel bellied rascal and repeat after me.’

And holding up a huge flagon above his head the gallant captain planted himself with his legs very wide apart and roared

out the following: 'To the High and Mighty Elizabeth the Protestant Princess I give my devotion and disclaim all other allegiance! Come, I say.' Jabez repeated it coughing.

'Good! Now for the shibboleth, whereby ye may know true men from knaves,' and so saying, he gave vent to one of those tremendous adjurations which the violence of party feeling at that date made unpleasantly common.

'I will not drink to profane sentiment,' cried Jabez in wrath, flinging the cup on the floor.

'Faith,' said Hum composedly, 'I like thy spirit. Thou wouldst have been a scurvy patch if thou hadst foresworn thy conscience at my bidding! but thou hast spilt the wine; Margeretta, thy husband's cup.'

'Nay,' said Pinchfee. 'No more. No more; bethink thee, 'tis the best Malmsey. Imperial Malmsey.'

'What of that? Thou canst not drink in the Tower! Use the good things thou hast—

'“Merry be while thou hast breath
For there's no drinking after death.”

‘Racks and thumbscrews, drink, I say!’

‘Oh—h—h,’ groaned the usurer, and half fainting drank.

‘Let be, Hum,’ said Gerrard, ‘thou wilt terrify him into an apoplexy.’

‘Nay, nay, he has not blood enough. Come, boys, to supper. Madge, when thy husband has spit himself into the dry fever, thou shalt be Lady Hum. Go to, Jabez, never scowl. Draw up and I will tell thee how the burghers of Delft tortured Balthazar, the murderer of the Prince of Orange.’

‘I pray thee forbear.’

‘Nay, ’twill strengthen thy nerves. Come, venison, ’twill make thee bold, lad. *Ger-rardo mio*, thy glass, ’twill serve as an example to thee shouldst thou ever be in like condition.’

‘For pity’s sake, Captain Hum—’

‘God’s blessing on the inventor of venison pasty,’ said Hum, with his mouth full. ‘Well, having captured this Balthazar they first flogged him with knotted cords.’

‘Good captain.’

‘They dipped him in salt water.’

‘Oh!’

‘They cut his flesh with split quills—another flagon, Madge—and wrapped him in a shirt soaked in vinegar and brandy.’

‘Captain Hum, there is a gold chain I have no use for. If—’

‘They plucked holes in him with pincers.’

‘Good captain, wilt not *thou*—’

‘Nay, nay,’ said Gerrard, ‘dost not remember that stab in the dark? Proceed, Hum.’

‘I have little more to say,’ returned Hum, ‘save that having wrenched his miserable soul back to his fainting body, they tortured him to death with inches of infinite agony. But fill up! Tut, wine cures all.

“A longing lass whose custard face
Her inward grief discloses,
With drinking wine so sweet and fine
Will gain a pair of roses.
It doth revive dead folks alive
And helps their former weakness,
It is so pure that it doth cure
A maiden of her sickness.”

‘*Gerrardo mio*, thou dost not drink.’

‘I am sad at heart,’ said Gerrard. ‘Tomorrow or next day sees the trial of these

misguided men, and I fear there is no hope for them.'

'Tis the fortune of war,' said Hum.
'An we had lost, they would have done
so much to us. Fie—

“To take our sorrows mournfully,
Augmenteth but our malady,
But taking sorrows merrily
Maketh them smaller, verily
Be merry, friends.”

'What said Phillips?'

'I am to meet him four days hence at
Lincolns Inn Fields.'

'Ease thy heart till then, lad. No harm
can come to thee. We have store of wine
and venison, a charming wench to serve us,
and a witty old fool to divert us. Fill up
and laugh—

“If friends be lost then get thee more,
If wealth be lost, thou still hast store,
The merry man is never poor,
He lives upon the world—therefore
Be merry, friends.”

CHAPTER XLI.

HIGH TREASON.

IN the High Court of Westminster, the Commission of Oyer, and Determiner of all manner of treasons, had been four days sitting.

The Court was crowded, and from the first it was known that there was no hope for the prisoners. They made but small defence.

‘I am condemned,’ said Charnock, ‘because I suffered Salisbury to be one of the conspirators. My case is hard—either to betray my friend whom I love as myself, and to discover Tom Salisbury, or else to break my allegiance to my sovereign, and to undo my self and my prosperity for ever’

‘I fled to warn my friends,’ said Tichbourne, ‘and I played the part of a friend.’

‘You have broken your allegiance to your sovereign,’ cried Topham.

Tichbourne bowed his head.

‘Therein have I offended.’

‘And wherefore went thou into the woods?’ was asked of Babington.

‘For company,’ said he haughtily.

There was evidently no hope.

‘If mercy is not to be had,’ said Abington, ‘I but beseech this. I owe some sums of money, not much—I have more owing to me—I pray that my debts may be paid with that which I have owing to me.’

‘Savage,’ said one of the judges, ‘you might have done good service to your country.’

‘Say you so? Then I pray that six angels which the host of the Stag hath of mine, may be given to pay my debts.’

They were all condemned—condemned to the terrible punishment adjudged fitting for treason.

They were to be taken to *Lincolns Inn Fields* and there hung upon gibbets.

But death was not to follow quickly. After hanging for a few moments they were to be cut down and their bowels taken out and burnt before their eyes. Their bodies were then to be cut into four quarters.

On the day appointed by Phillips, Gerrard and Hum made their way to the trysting place. The great square of Lincolns Inn Fields was crowded with people who hooted and howled as the prisoners were dragged on hurdles through the midst surrounded by a guard of 500 horse. Round the high scaffold were 600 arquebuses their steel caps glittering and their matches smoking.

Four executioners awaited to perform their hideous office. The two men forced themselves through the crowd and made their way to the centre of the square. They saw Phillips standing near the scaffold. He had brought them to hear the last of the conspiracy.

Ballard was first executed and snatched alive from the gallows. The assistant executioner a man named Barefoot seeing him alive and praying, hesitated. The mob pulled at the rope and flung the Jesuit on

his back. Barefoot then fell to work to disembowel Ballard, the unhappy priest being so present to himself as to make a sign of the cross with one hand. The others fell on their knees praying.

When the headsman began his tremendous office upon Babington the young man cried *Parce mihi Domine Jesu* and was then silent. It was half-an-hour before he died.

When Tichbourne's turn came he made a short speech and looking at the bloody relics of Babington said, 'Alas, the regard of thee has brought me hither! Before this chanced we lived together in most amicable estate. Of whom else went the report on the Strand and Fleet Street but of Babington and Tichbourne. No threshold was of force to bar our entry. Then we lived and wanted nothing we could live for. My dear countrymen, our plot has failed; but my sorrows may be your joy yet; mix your smiles with tears and pity my case. I am descended from a house 200 years from the conquest, never stained but by my misfortune. I have a wife and one child,

my wife Agnes, my dear wife and one sister left in my hands. There is my grief.'

He then took a letter from his bosom kissed it, gave it to Phillips and muttering a prayer surrendered himself to the hands of the executioner.

As he took the packet Phillips' eyes fell upon Gerrard and he beckoned him.

Gerrard, pale as death, forced his horse through the press.

Phillips still holding the packet in one hand took out of his belt another paper.

Gerrard eyed Tichbourne's packet as though he would devour it.

A smile crossed Phillips' dark face.

'You may take them both,' said he, and put them both into his hands.

Tichbourne's packet was for his wife. The other letter was for the Earl of Shrewsbury and addressed—

' FOTHERINGAY CASTLE,
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.'

It was the death warrant of the Queen of Scots.

CHAPTER XLII.

GERRARD'S MESSAGE.

It was Sunday evening when Gerrard arrived at Fotheringay.

Fotheringay Castle stood not far from the Wen upon a slight eminence arising in the midst of the flat levels of Northamptonshire. The castle was full of Paulet's soldiers and the little village over-stocked with the train of the head commissioners who had been sent down to examine into Mary's complicity in the conspiracy. The commissioners had been selected from the best blood and brain in England. It was impossible that a prisoner tried by such men as the Earls of Oxford, Kent, Derby, Cumberland, Warwick, Pembroke and Lincoln,

the Chief Justices, Wray and Anderson Chief Baron Manwood, and Bingley, the Lord Chancellor, would receive anything but the strictest justice.

Mary knew that she was on trial for her life, but she doubted if the utmost penalty of her guilt would be exacted. 'She was a Princess,' she said, 'and amenable to no earthly law whatever!'

Bingley enjoined that any and every person who in England broke English laws was amenable to punishment. She denied all knowledge of the plot. She did not know Babington, had never spoken to him, or written to him. For answer they read to her her own letters and Babington's replies. She affirmed that both were forgeries, her cipher had been counterfeited. The confessions of the conspirators and the admissions of her own secretaries Nan and Curle were put in. She said they had been tortured into lying. Walshingham disdained to argue.

'Here is the evidence,' said he, 'judge accordingly.' The commissioners did the only thing possible for honest men to do.

They found the Queen of Scots guilty, and left her sentence to Parliament.

That sentence Walter Gerrard bore with him from Phillips' own hands. Arrived at the castle he sought the Earl of Shrewsbury. The Earl read the letter and sent a special messenger for the Sheriff of Northamptonshire. On Monday evening the Earl of Kent arrived, and the two demanded admittance to the imprisoned Queen. Mary was sitting on a low stool reading, or feigning to read.

'What is it gentlemen?' she asked. Shrewsbury made an effort to speak and failed. He had not seen Mary since she was first under his charge in the days when Babington was her page.

'Speak thou,' said he to Kent.

The Earl of Kent was a stern and cold Puritan. Mary was for him but a wicked woman, overtaken at last by the well merited punishment which she had too long escaped.

Solemnly, briefly and sternly he delivered his awful message.

'Madam,' said he, 'we hold a commission

under the Great Seal to see you executed. You must prepare to suffer.'

'When?' asked she.

'To-morrow morning.'

For a moment she refused to believe them. Then as the truth forced itself upon her she called her physician and began to speak to him about money which was owed to her in France.

Her women burst into tears, and at last she herself broke down, and the Commissioners left her with a fear that she would either destroy herself in the night or refuse to come to the scaffold, and that it would be necessary to drag her there by violence.

But Mary was made of sterner stuff. She had played her game and lost it. It remained for her to lose as became a good player.

The first sharp agony over, she recalled her spirits. A consummate actress, she had a part to play which needed all her talents, and which gratified all her taste for dramatic representations. She was to die a martyr to Catholicism. Having been balked in an attempt at murder, she had deliberately refused to do justice to the men who had

risked their lives for her, and she had twice perjured herself. Nevertheless it behoved her to meet her death like a saint. Did she die with dignity she might yet leave her name as a legacy of ignominy to her destroyers. There was no glory in being executed for an attempt to procure assassination. But as a martyr to her faith, like Sampson, she might invoke her enemies in her mien, and purchase pardon for her last falsehoods by giving victory to the Church.

She sent word to her chaplain to pray for her and supped cheerfully. After supper she drew aside her apothecary Gorien.

‘Can I depend upon your fidelity?’

‘Have you not tried it?’

She gave him two diamonds, one for Mendoza, and the other for Philip of Spain.

‘I commend to the care of the Catholic King,’ said she, ‘all my faithful servants—Arundel, Paget, Morgan, Nan, Curle, Barbara Tichbourne.’ She neglected none. ‘Tell him,’ cried she, ‘to persevere in the invasion of England. Do not let him think of my death. It is God’s quarrel, and he will help us conquer.’

To the King of France she wrote denying any share in the conspiracy, and begging him to pay her servants' wages out of the sum he owed her.

Then she beckoned her attendants and retired to dress for the last act of the drama.

Gerrard in the meantime had made his way to Barbara Tichbourne, and given her the letter from her brother. He found that she had already been made aware of the fate of the conspirators.

'It will be my turn soon,' said she.

'I will obtain your pardon,' said Gerrard. 'They owe me something, and Phillips would rather part with anything than money.'

So between them it was arranged what should be done.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE EXECUTION.

THE news of the approaching act of justice had spread quickly enough. Thousands of people had collected outside the walls, and more than three hundred knights of the county had been admitted to witness the execution.

The tables and forms in the long room had been removed. A large wood fire was blazing in the chimney. At the upper end of the hall stood a scaffold twelve feet square and two feet and a half high. It was covered with a black cloth, the sheriff's guard of halberdiers were ranged on the floor below to keep off the crowd. On the scaffold was a block, black like the rest, a

black cushion was placed behind it, and behind the cushion a black chair. The axe leant against the wall and two masked figures stood mute on either side.

Walter Gerrard pressing through the crowd to his appointed place near Sir Amias Paulet saw this gloomy show and shuddered.

‘Go,’ said the Sheriff to the Provost Marshal, and as that officer struck at the door with his wand, it opened, and the tall majestic figure of Mary Stuart stood before them in all its splendour.

The plain grey dress which she had worn at her trial was exchanged for a robe of black satin. Her jacket was of black satin also, looped and slashed with velvet.

Her false hair was arranged under a coif and over her head and down her back was a white veil of delicate lawn. A crucifix of gold hung from her neck and in her hand she held a crucifix of ivory and a number of jewelled paternosters. Her ladies followed her, weeping.

At her entrance a murmur arose, but the Queen, serene as if coming to take her part

in some great pageant looked round smilingly and mounted the scaffold with firm step. Shrewsbury and Kent followed. The Sheriff stood at the right hand, and then Walter Gerrard, as the trusted messenger of the Queen, read out the warrant.

‘Madam,’ said Lord Shrewsbury, ‘you hear what we are commanded to do.’

‘You will do your duty,’ said she, and fell on her knees.

Gerrard saw Barbara Tichbourne look at him, and understood how it was possible to conspire for love of a woman. The kneeling woman recited in clear tones the penitential psalms in Latin, introducing English sentences here and there, so that the people might understand what she was saying, and praying with special distinctness for Her Holy Father, the Pope. From time to time with conspicuous vehemence she struck the crucifix against her bosom and her prayers re-echoed through the hall. She prayed for everybody, she prayed for the Church which she had been ready to betray, for her son whom she had disinherited, for the Queen whom she had en-

deavoured to murder. She prayed God to avert his wrath from England, that England which she had sent a last message to Philip to beseech him to invade.

She forgave her enemies whom she had invited Philip not to forget, and then praying to the Saints to intercede for her with Christ, and kissing the crucifix, and crossing her own breast, 'Even as Thy arms, O Jesus,' she cried, 'were spread upon the Cross, so receive me into Thy mercy, and forgive my sins.'

With these words she rose, the black mutes stepped forward and in the usual form begged her forgiveness.

'I forgive you,' she said, 'for now I hope you shall end all my trouble.'

They offered her help in arranging her dress.

'Truly, my lords,' said she, with a smile to the Earls, 'I never had such grooms waiting on me before.'

Her ladies were allowed to come up on the scaffold to assist her, for the work to be done was considerable and had been prepared with no common thought. She laid

her crucifix on her chair. The chief executioner took it as a perquisite but was ordered instantly to lay it down. The lawn veil was lifted carefully off not to disturb the hair and was hung upon the rail. The black robe was next removed. Below it was a petticoat of crimson velvet. The black jacket followed and under the jacket was a bodice of crimson satin. One of her ladies handed her a pair of crimson sleeves with which she hastily covered her arms, and thus she stood on the black scaffold with the black figures all around her, blood-red from head to foot. Her reasons for adopting so extraordinary a costume must be left to conjectures. It is only certain that it must have been carefully studied and that the pictorial effect must have been appalling.

The women, whose firmness had hitherto borne the trial, began now to give way, spasmodic sobs bursting from them which they could not check, '*Ne criez vous,*' she cried. '*J'ai promis pour vous.*'

Struggling bravely they crossed their

breasts again and again, she crossing them in turn and bidding them pray for her.

Then she knelt on the cushion. Barbara Tichbourne bound her eyes with a handkerchief. 'Adieu,' she said smiling for the last time, and waving her hand to them; 'adieu, *au revoir*.' They stepped back from the scaffold and left her alone.

On her knees she repeated the psalm '*In te Domine speravi*,' 'In thee O Lord I have put my trust.'

Her shoulders being exposed, two scars became visible, one on either side, and the Earls being now a little way behind her, Kent pointed to them with his white hand, and looked inquiringly at his companion. Shrewsbury whispered that they were the remains of two abscesses from which she had suffered while living with him at Sheffield.

When the Psalm was finished, she felt for the block, and laying down her head, muttered, '*In manus tuas Domine commendo animam meam*.' The hard wood seemed to hurt her, for she placed her hands under her neck. The executioner

gently removed them lest they should deaden the blow, and then one of them holding her lightly, the other raised the axe and struck.

The scene had been too trying even for the practised headsman of the Tower. His arms wandered. The blow fell on the knot of the handkerchief, and scarcely broke the skin. She neither spoke nor moved. He struck again, this time effectively. The head hung by a shred of skin which he divided without withdrawing the axe, and at once a metamorphosis was witnessed strange as was ever wrought by hand of fabled enchanter.

The coif fell off and the false plaits. The laboured illusion vanished. The lady who had knelt down before the block was in the maturity of grace and loveliness. The executioner, when he raised the head as usual to show it to the crowd, exposed the withered features of a grizzled, wrinkled old woman.

‘So perish all enemies of the Queen,’ said the Dean of Peterborough.

A loud ‘Amen’ arose over the hall.

‘Such end,’ said the Earl of Kent, rising and standing over the body, ‘to the Queen’s and the Gospel’s enemies.’

Orders had been given that everything which she had worn should be immediately destroyed, that no relic should be carried off to work imaginary miracles. Sentinels stood at the doors, who allowed no one to pass out without permission, and after the first pause, the Earls still keeping their places, the body was stripped.

It then appeared that the lap dog which Babington had given her had followed its mistress unperceived, and was concealed under her clothes. When discovered it gave a short cry, and seated itself between the head and the neck, from which the blood was still flowing. It was carried away and carefully washed, and the beads, paternosters, handkerchief, each article of dress which the blood had touched, with the cloth on the block and on the scaffold, was burnt in the hall fire in the presence of the crowd. The scaffold itself was next removed. A brief account of the execution was drawn up, with which Henry Talbot

(Lord Salisbury's son) was sent to London, and then everyone was dismissed.

Silence settled down on Fotheringay, and the last scene in the life of Mary Stuart, in which tragedy and melodrama were so strangely intermingled was over.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHO GILBERT GIFFORD WAS.

THE events which followed upon the execution of Mary are matters of history. Every schoolboy knows how Elizabeth denied that she had ordered the act of justice, how Davison was imprisoned, and Walshingham for the moment disgraced.

It has not yet been recorded, however, in any history with which I am acquainted, that a week after the scene at Fotheringay Walter Gerrard came to Sion House to see his employer.

‘So you have come for payment,’ said Walshingham.

‘I have.’

‘What do you claim?’

‘Something easy to give—a woman’s life.’

‘You mean Barbara Tichbourne,’ said Walshingham slowly. ‘It is granted. It would be the worst policy in the world to annoy her. Let her give up masquerading and live at home.’

‘You know of her too then,’ said Gerrard surprised.

‘Of course, I have spies everywhere.’

‘Sir,’ said Gerrard suddenly ‘I am tired of this service. Let me go back into my native obscurity. I ask no reward. Tell me one thing only—who was the man who really betrayed these gentlemen to their deaths.’

Walshingham looked at him and smiled. ‘The man whom I set you to watch. *That* man,’ and drawing aside a curtain which covered a sort of window in the panel, he showed Gerrard a figure talking to Master Phillips.

Phillips waved his hand as if in adieu and the figure arose to depart.

It was Gilbert Gifford. ‘And *that* is he,’ cried Gerrard clapping his hand on his sword hilt.

‘That is he, a double traitor.’

‘And being a double traitor you set me to watch him.’

‘Exactly.’

And as he spoke Gilbert Gifford turned and went out.

‘Do you want me longer?’ asked Gerrard.

‘No; begone if thou wilt, I need thee no more,’ returned Walshingham smiling again.

Gerrard went out. As he did so Phillips entered by another door.

‘Gifford has been here for his five thousand crowns.’

‘Well!’

‘Have you got them?’

‘Yes,’ and the Minister took out his bag.

‘He will return in an hour.’

‘Look out of that window, good Phillips.’

‘I am looking.’

‘What do you see.’

‘Nothing save Gifford hurrying off with my message to little Pinchfee.’

‘Look again.’

‘Ah!’

‘You start.’

‘Walter Gerrard is following him.’

‘Following, eh!’

‘How looks he.’

‘Pale and stern.’

‘Good’ returned Walshingham complacently locking up the bag. ‘It somehow occurs to me that our little Jesuit will not return to-day.’

‘You have told him then?’ asked Phillips who at once comprehended the Minister’s manœuvre. ‘It was perhaps the best way,’ said Phillips.

‘It is certainly less expensive,’ returned Walshingham.

CHAPTER XLV.

JABEZ PINCHFEE MAKES A BAD BARGAIN.

ON leaving Sion House Gilbert Gifford went straight to the residence of the usurer. Arrived at the door he drew a long barrelled key from his pocket and slipped it into the lock. The door opened at once and he entered.

Just as the door closed, Walter Gerrard, breathless with haste came round the corner.

‘He has escaped me,’ he said, and then recognising the house where he had supped with Hum he did the most natural thing in the world, knocked at the door. There was no reply. He knocked again with like result, and then impelled by curiosity he

clapped his eye to the huge keyhole. He saw Gilbert Gifford with his hand on his sword.

‘I will wait till he comes out,’ said Gerrard and withdrew into the angle of the wall.

Gifford waited a few minutes, and not hearing further sound betook himself upstairs. The house was empty. Gifford seemed to expect this for he went straight to a panel in the wainscot, touched a spring which opened a cupboard in the wall and drew out a wooden box. He forced the lid with his dagger and disclosed an iron casket. This he opened with another key which he carried and stood gazing at the splendours thus revealed to him. The casket was full of jewels.

‘Dear little Jabez, these will serve me better than thee,’ said he, and began leisurely to fill his pockets. As he was doing so, a head protruded itself from the door jamb.

It was Jabez himself. The usurer’s hand followed his head and in another second a pistol shot followed. Before he could turn Gifford was upon him with a bound like a

tiger. 'Viper,' he cried, 'wouldst thou assassinate me?'

'You were robbing me,' said Pinchfee. 'Oh, I have fathomed thee, Father Gifford. Thy letter bidding me close my house, and repair to Highgate was but a blind. I know thee for a traitor, and have so proclaimed thee when I say that robbery——' Gifford's face grew dark.

'Bah,' he said. 'Thou hast discovered me then. It is time to end the farce,' and drawing his dagger he deliberately plunged it into the wretched money lender's side. Jabez Pinchfee fell dead with but one groan.

Gifford wiped his poignard on the clothes of the corpse, pocketed the rest of the jewels, smoothed his dress and descended the stairs.

'In another hour,' said he, 'I shall be safely on my way to Harwich with 5000 crowns and Walshingham's safe conduct.'

So saying, he opened the door and stood face to face with Walter Gerrard.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

‘WHAT means this!’ cried Gifford.

‘I want to speak to you,’ said Gerrard quickly, and stepping in shut the door behind him.

‘Speak then and quickly. Your business.’

‘I am going to kill you.’

Gifford drew his sword in an instant. ‘Dost come to murder me?’ he cried, the memories of his own guilt perhaps making him tremble.

‘I come here to avenge the deaths of the gallant gentlemen whom you betrayed. On guard!’ In another instant their weapons crossed. Gifford stood with his back to the stairs, and the furious attack of his

enemy drove him back. He took advantage of his position to mount the lower steps. For the first nine seconds neither were hit, and then Gifford made a brilliant thrust in *carte* over the arm and drew blood. Before he could recover, however, which he attempted to do in half circle, Gerrard ran him through the shoulder. Both men now felt that they were fighting for life. On the third step Gifford made another point by a keen parry of a thrust in a second which would have ripped his throat, and a return in *prime* so near to Gerrard's heart that he felt the blood trickle down his shirt. Gerrard leapt upstairs and forced his adversary on to the landing. There each wounded the other, and Gifford grazed Gerrard's forehead. Gerrard cut open Gifford's thigh. Gifford who was a superb swordsman now made one of those magnificent feints which are the triumph of the fencing school. Encouraging Gerrard to thrust by a failing attack *en flanconnade* he allowed the point to pass under his arm, twisted his wrist *en carte* to the height of his adversary's face, passed his

left foot behind his right, and then with his body half-turned round executed a rapid thrust which wounded Gerrard in the breast. Gerrard, desperate, caught up the blade in his hand, and pressing close upon Gifford dealt him such a blow on the head that he fell against the door, which burst open. The corpse of Pinchfee lay before them.

‘Great God,’ cried Gerrard, ‘there is a corpse.’

Gifford took advantage of the exclamation to run him clean through the body and bound upstairs. Gerrard reeling drew a pistol and fired, the ball broke Gifford’s leg who fell groaning. Now began a curious scene. Gifford dragged himself upstairs by his hands.

‘If I can only reach the roof,’ said he, ‘I am safe.’

Gerrard sat on the floor and deliberately bound his wound with his scarf.

‘If I do not kill him before he reaches the top stair he will escape,’ said he, and crawled after with his sword in his teeth.

Gifford reached the roof first, but before

he could bar the leaden door Gerrard caught him and tried to plunge his sword into his throat. The effort burst the bandages, however, and he fell. Gifford caught him in his arms, and feeling that his own death approached, smiled with an infernal joy at the thought that he would be the means of another destruction.

Setting his teeth he began—still clutching Gerrard—to roll over and over towards the edge of the roof. At that moment Gerrard opened his eyes.

He saw before him the panorama of London, above him the blue sky flecked with white clouds. In vain he strove to save himself. His strength failed him, he closed his eyes and muttered a last prayer. Suddenly he felt Gifford's grasp relax and something warm spouted into his face. Then a strong hand clutched him by the collar and a voice he knew well cried out—

‘Belly of the Pope, but I am just in time. My little Jesuit, we are quits at last.’

Gerrard was in the arms of Hum who had returned in time to despatch Gifford in the orthodox fashion of a sword thrust.

L'ENVOI.

‘WHEN experienced chess players,’ says Froude, ‘see that the game is over, they sweep the pieces from the boards.’ Our story ends with the determination of the plot against the Queen’s life. Though, perhaps, we may again come upon Nicholas Hum and his master, for the present we end the tale of their adventures, by relating a conversation which took place in the garden of Gerrard’s house at Chartley.

‘And so that was the letter,’ said Walter to his wife.

‘Ay, read it.’

Gerrard took the paper from Barbara’s hands. It was the same which had been given him by Phillips on the day of the

execution of the conspirators. He opened and read as follows—

‘To the most lovinge wife alive I commend me unto her and desire God to blesse her with all happiness, pray for her dead husband and be of good comforte, for I hope in Jesus Christ this morning to see the face of my Maker and Redeemer in the most joyful throne of His glorious kingdom. Commend me to all my friends and desire them to pray for me, and in all charitie to pardon me if I have offended them. Commend me to my six sisters, poore desolate soules advise them to serve God, for without Him no goodness is to be expected. Were it possible my little sister Babb, the darlinge of my race, might be bred by her (God would reward her) but I do her wrong I confesse that hath by my desolate negligence to little for herselfe, to add a further charge unto her. Deere wife forgive me, that have, by these meanes so much impoverished her fortunes; patience and pardon good wife I crave—make of these our necessities a virtue and lay no further burthen on my neck than hath already been. There be certain debts that I owe, and because I know not the order of the lawe pitious it hath taken from me all forfeited by my course of offence to Her Majesty, I cannot advise thee to benefit me herein, but if there fall out wherewithall, let them be discharged for God’s sake. I will not that you trouble yourselfe with the performance of these matters, my own heart, make it known to my uncles and desire them for the honour of God and the ease of their soules to take care of them as they may, especially care of my sisters bringing up the burthen is now laide on them. Now, sweet cheek, what is left to bestow on thee? a small joynture, a small recompense for thy

deservinge, these legacies followinge to be thine owne. God of His infinite goodness give thee grace alwaies to remain his true and faithful servant, that through the merits of His bitter and blessed passion thou maist become in good time of His kingdom with the blessed women in heaven. May the Holy Ghost comforte thee with all necessities for the wealth of thy soul in the world to come, where until it shall please Almighty God I meete thee, farewell loving wife, farewell dearest to me on all the earth—farewell!

‘By the hand, from the heart of thy most faithful loving husband,

‘CHIDIOCK TICHBURN.’

‘There is yet another paper,’ said Gerrard.

‘A copy of verses,’ and in her turn she read:—

VERSES

Made by Chidiock Tichbourne of himself in the Tower the night before he suffered death, who was executed in Lincolns Inn Fields for Treason 1586.

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares
 My feast of joy is but a dish of pain,
 My crop of corn is but a field of tares,
 And all my goodes is but a vain hope of gain.
 The day is fled and yet I saw no sun,
 And now I live, and now my life is done!

My spring is past and yet it hath not sprung,
 The fruit is dead and yet the leaves are green,
 My youth is past and yet I am but young,
 I saw the world and yet I am not seen,
 My thread is cut and yet it is not spun,
 And now I live and now my life is done!

I sought for death and found it in the wombe,
I lookt for life and yet it was a shade,
I trode the ground and knew it was my tombe,
And now I die and now I am but made,
The glass is full and yet my glass is run,
And now I live and now my life is done !

‘Nay, do not weep,’ said Gerrard, ‘’tis the fate of all to die.’

‘Marry, thou art right,’ cried a jovial voice on the terrace, and turning their heads the newly married pair beheld above them a tall gentleman dressed in most magnificent attire, and having on his arm a little lass equally radiant.

‘By heavens ’tis Hum,’ cried Gerrard, ‘what fortune has befallen thee?’

‘Marriage, Alcibiades. Could I remain uncaught when *thou* wert trapped. No! My Margery, having put her Jabez snugly under ground, came blushing to mine arms. Didst thou not, Madge?’

‘Silence!’ said his dame bridling.

‘Silence, no! Let us rejoyce rather. We have fought our battle, and we shall enjoy our spoils. Sweet mistress, by your leave, one stave—

“Cast away care! He that loves sorrow
Lengthens not a day nor can buy to-morrow,
Money is trash and he that will spend it
Let him drink merrily, fortune will send it.
Merrily! Merrily! Merrily ho!
Play it off stiffy, ho! ho! ho!”

‘*Gerrardo mio!* come thee in, and let us
drink The Protestant Faith in some of my
sherries!’

THE END.

Stirling, December 1894-

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